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DRAMATIC
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DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

BY

FRANCIS P. OSMASTON

LONDON

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LOAN STACK

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PART I

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

THREE KISSES

WHEN first above the wilderness of souls,
Who strive for the mastery with Life on Earth,
And here and there break sudden from the mist,
And mark an opening to the light beyond,
These struck upon the courses of wide wings,
Each with great awe beholding the uprise
Of an imperial eagle o'er the abyss,
They looked not straight toward the prodigy,
But rather, as it were, an imaged spirit,
The soul's ideal essence, which each one
Had deftly joined with art to vital shape,
Working in the pure ore ; which counterfeits,
Though fashioned of most vivid loveliness,
Revealed alone to natures of proved kinship,
Ay, and affinity,—to such as held

The sword of Love, wherewith to rend the same
And pluck their message,—the most secret heart
Of the subtle craftsman, which each veil concealed,
If to some few a witness. In this wise,
Though strangers unto sight, each loved and wor-
shipped,
But still as from afar and silently,
The other's handiwork, the gems which each
Inlaid above their world, seeking no less
The heart o' the mine, whose throes precipitate,
Orbed now and sealed with art's full confirmation,
Thrilled most where the dense night seemed most in
need.

And when at last these pales of gossamer,
These threads across their eyes were rent asunder ;
When he stepped nearer to behold this lady
Through lovely gates, which cleared an avenue
Straight to the unseen temple ; when amazed
She looked at him and saw, half unawares,
The angel in the way fling open doors,
And beckon her to follow ; when he stood
Unbared within the tents of that same twilight,
The notes of this most lustrous nightingale
Had long since presaged, face to face with all
The suffering which had inscribed on her

For seal a martyr's patience ; when before
The light which gathered in the woman's eyes
The largess of a sudden exaltation,
Which is Love's sentinel to trumpet forth
The spreading marvel in a manly breast,
Seemed to shine round her ever and increase
Upon his countenance ; then she, whose strength
Was perfected with weakness, who looked back
Most wistfully perforce unto her Past,
That daring herald of her present lover,
The voice which ebbed away so faltering now,
The voice of one who trod life's bitter verge,
Awake to its vast shadow, ay, betrothed
To the approaching dark,—e'en while he moved
To lay her sinking flower on the dawn,
Essayed to shut its petals, nor to let
A man, herself gave up most willingly
Unto the perfect mate, coequal in
All outward gifts and ripeness of the soul,—
That soul she held God's bounty to the world,
Swerve from the appointed task, to waste the flood
Of its spring-tide perchance as menial
To her infirmities : humbly she leaned
Against the billowed salutation there,
Waving the same with benedictions from

Her wilderness of sorrows : yet in vain :
Rather in that she smote the tremulous skirts
Of the ascending seas with sharp recoil,
She flashed the sense which has no means to weigh
Or measure well its own munificence,
Woke the invading wonder at its depths,
Stirred the advance of powers invincible
To fold her utterly. Thus sorely matched
She must fain bear her now as any child
On the dear mother's bosom, waiting thus
In solemn peace to watch this holy thing
Which seemed about to happen. Surely then
The dower of these kisses, one by one,
In pure succession trembled through her life ;
Birth of the morning radiance in his soul,
Sweet as the vivid dew upon the vales,
Unclustered from night's shadows, opening
The jewels of the dawn, therewith to crown
The drooping grass, the daisy of the field ;
Sweet as the mercy of the Lord to her,
Who garnered them to keep and hold for ever :
The first dropped soft as any weft of snow
Upon that spirit hand, which once penned clear
Songs of great rapture, leading him aside
To listen to the magic utterance,

Seraphic, birdlike, rich with faith and praise,
And deep with solitary travail held
Crushed down beneath masked silences, the power
And mellow tone of all. The second swept
Light as a whispered breath of April on
The open brow, yet partly missed the mark,
Shot to a grander height, and dying off
Among the tangle whorls of loosened hair,
Which are the glory of a woman's head,
Came to him with a wondrous tenderness,
Most winsome to the touch, softly uncurled
As mist about the hills. Gently they fell,
These gracious harbingers of Love's estate,
Then passed in breath away, leaving the sense
Of hidden greatness, the full height and depth
Of that most simple reverence, which made
Her work of love a missal unto him
Whereon to read the features of a soul
And gather all their secret : thankfully,
With joy exceeding, she took up those gifts ;
Yet waited at her post, intently armed
With pregnant admonitions, for the boon
Closer to her than all, more inly dear
To the reverberant heartstrings. Only when,
Behind the muffled pause, which after them

Filled like a thundercloud before its sheer
Deliverance of light,—she felt through all
Her quickened sense the entire pulse and flow
Of Love's tumultuous armies touch her there,
Clad in Earth's simplest womanhood,—ay, then
Her very being rose to clasp the wave
And consummate its glory, heart to heart
With his soul's insurrection. Sovereignly
He laid the perfect kiss upon the lips
Of woman wholly wed and bound to him,
Standing in Nature's temple,—the whole man
Discovered with Love's presence ; and from gates
Whose bars fell off unloosed, fell off for ever,
He caught this heart's confession on the wing,
A thrill of ecstasy,—*my love, my own.*

ANY PASSER-BY

NOT know the parish church, Saint Mary-le-bone ;
Why, bless me, sir, you must be country bred :
You should have timed your entry on the scene
A trifle sooner though, waved off the pair ;
Ay, caught this happy couple hurrying,
In handsome brougham, rosettes, and all the rest,
To Brighton, or say Paris just as like,
'Tis never safe to hazard where such folk
Will trip it for their undivided shares
Of perfect bliss, whose blossoms (bubbles, eh ?)
Shine gloriously in France or Timbuctoo,
Yet fade in England, so the noodles think :
Well, well, you've missed this time at any rate
As pretty a sight as one may wish to see
In clear September : come, the organ's march
Is wheeling to a close, your gaping crowd
Thins to mere curl of smoke ; a wedding now
Which warmed the place up. All by chance I took
My sly peep at the show from gallery

Some good ten minutes since : just as I guessed,
The two were in the vestry scrawling down
Their precious names beneath a chequered sky
Of April drops and flashes ; what with white
Stuck everywhere about the chancel's wreath,
Smart dresses too, which glistered up so fine
From friends a-buzzing in the pews below,—
Lilac, it seems, is now the colour most
In vogue among your ladies : what,—for this
Struck most my fancy,—with one long array
Of girls perched straight in front of the parade,
Fresh cherubs from our Orphan Charity,
Dressed neat and quiet, with clean linen caps
To shine on each chit's head ; why, with it all,
I stood nor budged an inch till man and wife,
Heading the gay procession, trooped at last
Through arch of lilies, daintily set up,
Ay, close to the front beneath those cherub faces,
To meet this blaze of sun, this staring mob
We still see thronging round us. After all
'Tis something of a fuss to make about
A simple curate's wedding, let alone
The general rights of making such to-do
When marriage is the service to be read
For poor or gentlefolk : I rather think

The point lies how your bit of joiner's work
 Stands out against the steady wear and tear
 Of life's long jaunt together. There's the rub,—
 Which ought, I doubt, to ring up all the bells,
 Or send a congregation quick to pray
 With muffled pulses for a startled week :
 But that, may be, is neither here nor there ;
 I rather wished to say this wife that is,
 Who kept a Bible class, I understand,
 And district in the parish,—well, she has
 Both cash and birth to lean on : ay, they say,
 He'll be promoted now a proper rate,
 And end with bishop's gaiters handsomely :
 The more's the pity, does it not strike you ?
 He's liked, you see, this curate here about,
 Not so stuck up as some of them, nor yet
 Without a spark or two to let you know
 There's something of a man beneath that suit
 Of moony black and white. Well, well, I know
 Just nothing of him,—now and then perhaps
 A word or two has dropped across my stall,
 Sometimes a nod, no more : ay, bless me, sir,
 Don't think the likes of these poor gentlemen,
 And he's not much to look at, when all's said,
 Have very close acquaintance with us folk

Who swarm like ants about this big grave church
And strip of trees that bounds it. Ay, the crowd,
They come and stare, the women most of all ;
But half of them scarce know why they have come,
And half keep half themselves still locked at home :
'Tis true enough,—just listen as I did
On yonder staircase : “ *O, I wish, I do,*”—
Grins some stout wench into her sister's ear,—
“ *This sun had toasted us, Elisa Jane,
A-washing yesterday :*” here this one whines,
“ *Don't talk to me of charity, my dear,
A precious deal of that we get at least
In Gordon Street.*” Each to the same rough tune,
And so on without end : yes, life is hard,
A bit too hard to walk outside of it,
With heels in air, and heart in neighbour's poke,
E'en at a wedding, sir : perhaps that's why
I try to snatch my whiff of light and green,
My stroll upon this tidy reach of gravel,
Outside the roar of cab and omnibus,
And children, drat the nuisance,—have my bow
To those twelve staring pillars yonder,—those
Strange goddesses, or Graces, which you please,
That plume it o'er the silence,—when there is
As little as may be to pester one

And spoil a quiet pipe. This time, it seems,
 The crowd has followed suit, and at their heels
 I too must now be off : but possibly
 You may be bound,—through Chiswell Street, I mean:
 Well, thank you, sir ; I like a friendly chat :
 You seem to share my fancy for the place ;
 Odd things have happened here, as I myself
 Can plainly vouch,—take this for sample now :
 As was my wont, some twenty years ago,
 I chanced to take my stroll one afternoon ;
 When rounding yonder rails what should I see
 But just a man already on the steps
 Of our great church, much in the place where we
 Came jostling through the press five minutes since :
 He looked your well-to-do, of moderate height,
 Top-hat, black coat, trousers of London make,
 Rigged much as you are, sir : his face, of course,
 Was out of sight at first ; briefly, I was
 Just rambling on, when something struck me in,—
 Well, in the general turn-out of the man :
 He seemed no loiterer, had somewhat there
 Of weight to do or watch apparently :
 Whatever may have been the itch with me,
 I wheeled about once more, and saw him now
 Top-hat in hand, knees down, and (it is truth

As I who speak it) mouth flat on the stones :
Ay, ay, he kissed that pavement twice, then rose,
Fronted our church as though he'd hug it all,—
Waited a moment, turned, swept in my stare,
And swooped where I was standing : for myself
My first thought ran on madness, then on what
Is often worse than madness in our streets :
How else, the deuce, should West End folk, I groaned,
Pay court to dust and flagstones ? Bear in mind
I had no artist fool to deal with here,
Your sentimental noddy,—oh ! I know,—
Washed eyes, loose jawbones, habits loose as well,
Inside as out, silk collars worse for reefage,
Locks anywhere ; rather most solid piece
Of English workmanship : to deal him fair,
When first I had him full in view, felt all
The broadside of his look, as you may say,
Set veins a-tingle ; well, I set him off
As something in your diplomatic line :
Apart from beard of rather foreign cut,
Strong eyebrows, forehead bold, a nose which had
Just curve enough to make you feel it bridged
The devil's force at times, why, there was, too,
A settled pose about this gentleman,
Which argued clear enough our mountebank

Went through his strange performance with an aim
Somewhat above the laughter of the pit
For which I stood, it seemed : ah, bless me, sir,
Don't fancy he was flustered ; why, he strolled
As comfortably to me as though he bowed
With Oriental promptness to the sun,
Concealed for him within our blessed church—
Well, once a day, at least : and yet, withal,
There was a kind of something in those eyes,
A twinkle o'er the down of depths below,
A sort of halo,—like your morning's breadth,—
A softness, shall I say, he brought with him,
Which struck me odd enough in one so like
Your buttoned man of world in other ways :
Ay, whether sane or mad,—we'll drop that bone,—
Rely on it he was some man of mark,
Could stand, I warrant, near your bullet heads
And face them with the best : confound it all,
If he was cracked I wish your parsons were
Somewhat less sane at times : he seemed to take
You by the heart at once ; not that he said
So much, I will confess, but all he said
Gave one the fillip of true fellowship,
Put one at ease, you know : yes, that was it,—
He looked you through without your knowing it,

Or if you knew it made you think he looked
For what was best to look for, none the less
Seemed interested quite with all I said,
And brightened with my bit of taste for books ;
Last, praised the church, and whispered under breath,
As though more to himself than me, how once
It brought a certain friend of his more good
Than he would ever answer for with life
And loving work to round it : that was all—
No, damn it, sir, for then he looked again,
Seemed half in doubt, but changed his whim and
smiled,

That smile was just the best thing that he did ;
Then he shook hands and parted. There's the tale.
Of course when I got home it all dropped out ;
Well, Susan, my poor wife,—ay, sir, she's gone
This many a year where all uncertainties,
We'll hope, clear up some fashion ; she just held
That all was plain as simple bread and cheese :
“ Why, any fool,” she laughed (I let her run,
She only stopped when I threw down the reins),
“ Could see with half an eye this gentleman
Was married to his lady in the church,
Spliced to some pretty doll he worshipped still
In spite of one long month.” But that, no doubt,

Is just your woman's trick of cutting each
And every knot one way : they always think
A woman must be hid beneath the crust,
When any strange occurrence crops above
Their sleepy vision's surface. Now, there's James,—
Oh, he's a 'cute one, smart with fingers too,
Should push up mighty fast if books and talk
Are steam enough to drive with, which I doubt,—
He's crammed his pate,—“ Oh, glorious pool,” I say,
“ Of dancing moonshine where the likes of us
Must swim or founder now-a-days, it seems,”—
With notions how his friends are going soon
To roll out all the world, rich folk and poor,
To one rare level ; still, I sometimes think,
He'd fare more easy, tracking the old dad,
To try and cut his trousers more in fit
With fashions round him : you'll forgive the vein,
My little bit of pride over the lad :
Well, James, he thought his mother quite astray,
Laughed at her that he did : “ Mark me, this
swell,”—

He always took most kindly to that word,—
“ Ran through his pavement bobbing for a joke,
At best, I'll wage, to back some heavy bet ;
Bless me, you don't half know how idle fools

Will strip their furs to wear a donkey's skin
And dance it straight to tatters." Ah, poor boy,
You see he never faced the lips of the ass,
As Balaam did, they say, and found behind
An angel too, if I remember right :
Which makes a difference. That being so
I struggle hard to steer between the two :
If Susan fetched the nail fair after all,
Well, what I say is this, and always shall,
I'd like to fasten eyes some day on her
Who raised up all this fuss and pother in,—
My friend, let's say for once : I warrant now
There's something rich to swallow, some ripe tune
To wet the whistle rarely, none of your
Milk-water mixtures, let alone the trash
They vomit here from Paris. As for James,
He stung me up somehow with all his chaff,
And took, I fear, a fling of pellets back :
"Oh, he might plane away," I growled in turn,
" 'Twould take more time and pains than he was
worth
To make some folk he snapped his fingers at
Run trim with his hobnails." I broke my laugh,
And eased a kind of tenderness, which had
Gripped on to me, the Lord knows only why.

But here we are, sir, run to anchorage,
 Right up against my pile : now won't you take
 Some trifling keepsake of this stroll together ?
 Some poet, ah, you've struck the flagship there
 On her weak lines I rather think. Let's see,
 Here's Samuel Johnson, prose and verse, complete
 One blessed volume. What's that psalm of yours ?
 Is *he* your precious minstrel ? Come, sir, come,
 A truce to trifling, please. Oh, yes, of course
 I've heard of him, or rather *her* perhaps
 I should have said, to plump the mark more squarely,
 'Tis *her* I fancy leastwise in the trade ;
 But, bless my soul, the fry we angle for
 Don't sniff that sort of stuff. I'm sorry though.
 Good-day, sir, if you must : you'll not forget
 Our bit of meeting, if I may be bold,
 When next you brush the place. Do I expect
 To catch the gentle curate on those steps,—
 "Translated," did you say ? I see the joke ;
 Ay, but he was a man, this friend of mine,—
 A rare one too to hold you by the heart.

A WOMAN'S JUDGMENT

WHAT is my fixed opinion of the man,
You know, dear, well enough ; and I have watched,
As few have watched him with a woman's eyes
These twenty years, with more than ample cause,
Believe me there at least, when I began
To watch from where you used to watch with me,
Ere London called the young disciple home :
One phrase shall sum it up from A to Z ;
He builds all for himself, builds all much as
Yon hairy cornered spider builds his house,
To bag out of his covert, my boudoir,
The pretty share of game which decorates
His walls with dried-up tendons : one frank aim
Inspires all his sublime activities ;
He is the most illustrious flower of
Your worldly selfishness : Napoleon's greed,
Exalted possibly to higher levels,
Somewhat ætherealised and clarified
Of the superfluous flesh, but at the base

And marrow just the same : if you have aught
To give him, and it must be freely owned
He is no Lazarus in his demands,
It matters little what the gift may be,—
Position, status, from the Duke his friend,
A gem, a bas-relief from Greece or Rome,
The portrait of some new familiar,
A savant's note of diplomatic praise,
(The sauce is cold enough when all is said),
The last word that æsthetic science lisps,
Or,—may I mention such a little thing,—
Ah, the mere trifles that a woman gives,
A silent look, a kiss with the whole heart,
The chatter of a bird that chirps too soon,
And takes December for the sweets of May,—
It matters not, I tell you, what is given,
All is but grist to the same mill ; he takes
The humble scrip or wallet that you bring,
Inspects at ease, sorts, measures, weighs its wares,
Then rifles the content of all he thinks
May add some worth or colour to his own ;
And hands you and your basket with a smile
Out of the open door, to clear a way
For heaven's next novelty : believe me, friend,
As with the head of him, so too the heart ;

We women come off naturally the worst :
The strangest thing of all is that one soul,
A woman's soul at least, a soul like yours,
Can doubt the fact after a single glance
At what some fools still think exemplify
Their idol's boundless heart, and illustrate
God's magnanimity to little men.
I leave you to run over all the list
Of flowers he sucked dry, then tossed away ;
The primrose, snowdrop (what a snowdrop too,
How exquisite it shone out of the green !),
Then lily—bah ! how many maids has he
Thrust largely on one side until, it seems,
He found his diagnosis of Love's first
Delicious bloom and fragrance 'gin to stale,
Fall sick for very surfeit, and give place
To hopes of capturing the enfolded bloom,
The outworked citadel and treasure-house
Of the ripe mellow matron, wise as he
In Earth's most noble wisdom : you have seen
The clever Baroness his worship led
Heaven knows how near the whirlpool's centre, till
He showed her in due turn the depth of all
His marvellous devotion, ten long years
Surrendered meekly to one mortal bosom,

And rounded off of course, the artist's whole,
With true parental grace, convenient hints
How best to piece together shattered nerves
With baths and moderate diet. Nay, what need
To run through all the waste monotony
He loves to dangle with? How does he now
Treat the last creature Jove's great look has tamed?
What of the mistress his last whim has made
The eye and apple of his home? 'Tis said,—
How phrase the miracle?—this dew-eyed Eve
Without a word capitulated straight,
When first our Lancelot challenged o'er the keep:
Most credible—oh! I can well believe it;
Your candied tongue, your catlike velvet paws
Are ever those which we poor women have
Most reason to observe, their bark and bite
Being much the keenest; when they flash out bare
They strike you to the kernel: but, why ask
What needy gossip flusters?—has not this
Most generous lover written the blunt truth
For all the world to toy 'twixt nail and thumb;—
Immortalised his *veni, vidi, vici*,
With quite exceptional taste, directness, rhythm,—
E'en with the luscious incense of the South,
The smoothness of Sicilian seas in summer?

Or shall we say of the swallow where she flits
Over heaven's mirrored surface on the pool,
Which hides its slumbering weeds so well away,
And shields soft muddy shallows with the show
Of azure meads and mountains of the moon,—
At least the afflatus, my professor vows,
Of a pure Greek, a born Anacreon ;
Penned the whole idyl,—why, I ask, if not,
Lest the poor orphaned world, when he is gone,
Might fail to chant *laudamus* over these
Nuptials of Aphrodite with himself ;
Or haply lest his consort might forget
The strange munificence of her last lord.
Such is the tale ; all ask with obvious cause
Why does the fellow not do that which each
And every man of common sense had done
(We will leave out of honour) long ago,—
Marry the pretty wench ; or, if too proud
For such a lame conclusion, spoiling, too,
The choicest of his poems, let her go,
After heaven's reasonable grace near him,
And marry some coarse honest ploughman, who
Would make her wife in earnest as due bound :
Not so the heart this little maid adores
With such a passion : “ Let me not admit

Impediments,"—you know fresh English, dear,—
"Unto the marriage of,"—what, any nymph
And veritable Apollo? By no means ;
Else had Apollo's servant slain indeed
The lute of his great master ; no, but minds
Coequal in descent from God and man :
Could any thought be more absurd than this,
Unless that thought which hangs on the other side,
Of flinging a most sweet briar-rose away,
Rose which leaned out so fair upon its thorn,
And gave that first slight prick we could forgive ;
Which it is clear just lives to embellish now
Our ordinary habit ; sure it were
Pure sacrilege to tumble back this flower
Into the common rut for any clown
Who passed in clogs to tread on ; what is more,
Ask the dear girl herself : " Believe me, sirs,
The Herr Geheimerath had long ago
Done all you wish for me ; 'tis I would not,
Nor ever will permit him thus abuse
The inviolable laws of wedlock." Oh, of course,
'Tis understood, if one word may be added
To illustrate the text you seem to have
So very much at heart ; a Countess lives,
Or used to live at least, not far from you,

For whom your text had fallen pat enough,
So far, at least, as earthly minds may rank
With minds whose orbits circle with the suns,—
And found this genius, him you dote upon,—
Clap hands in mighty earnest ; but, alas,
The woman I refer to, half divine,
Shows still rude specks of the vile worldly taint,
In one regard is even less than you ;
And having first through green stupidity
Read the text wrong, and married some one far
Below the august requirements of her soul,
More foolishly maintains the open gloss ;
Refuses when the god himself appears,—
Patet incessu deus, I am told,
Gives the fair sense in Latin,—to blot out,
With one courageous stroke, the error made,
And read heaven's text divinely ; hugs her home
And all the grossness of her husband too.
Tut, tut, how the stale theme drags ever on,
Quickens an old lament I thought the years
Had long since clothed with softness ; well, at
least
I have learned how to suffer, would teach you,
That you may never suffer as I have,
The secret of this life and principle,

Which even now is dying, dying I say ;
Yes, it is clear this heart of superfine
Austere exclusiveness has long since lost
The little power it ever had to love ;
I doubt if he admires even himself :
He is come down to man's pathetic stage,
When the starved cripple tries to think his crust
A baker's loaf, and treasures crumbs that fall
From richer tables ; like a worn game-cock
That struts the rubbish heap he whiles his time
In poring over curiosities,
Picking and tasting useless odds and ends,
Thinking loose pebble stones the rarest pearls :
'Twas only yesterday that we were told
Newton was a mere fool for all his pains :
I won't pretend that I have mastered all
The irrefragable proof ; life is too short,
Too short at least for me, with all my cares,
The thousand petty ruffs which must be smoothed,
For rolling down the Andes ; as I gather
The gist or humour of mind's last correction
Is that the Night's dark brush, no less than Day's,
Unravels the Dawn's colours. Iris was,
According to Minerva's latest word,—
I leave you to decipher it apart,—

By no means the Olympian messenger,
But rather quite as much, frankly say more,
The minister of Hades. Thus at least
The professorial pencil sketched me truth,
As our great modern has discovered her,
Priming the godlike gift, you may be sure,
With that more personal boon in many a wave
Of raw Homeric laughter whence you writhe
And scramble feeling drowned. What is the last
Strange fish-pond that has felt our eminent friend's
Line dabble in with tiny hook and worm
I hardly know or care? 'Tis said he now
Sits pensively observant of the moon,
Which very well may be, who long ago
Was such a sage observer of himself;
Probes the recumbent orb in one of her
Phases significant, when the old fire,
Which sucked the life-blood from the central core,
Racked a whole world in chaos of the pit
And awful suicide, hurled to the heavens
Mountains of insurrection, quenched the stars,—
'Gins to die down at last, congeal her mass
In scars whose silence has the tone of Death,
In bergs of frosted stone impenetrable,
Whence all the soft glad vapours of the Spring,

Which took and kissed the young Days wreathed in
light

And tears of silvery laughter now has fled,
Leaving that visage imperturbable,
Stark, obdurate, disastrous, we admire,
(Admire at least my burst of eloquence,
And prop the halting likeness if you can);
Cold as those statues which adorn the stairs,—
Nausicaa, Odysseus, Phryne, Pan,—
Up to the golden chamber, whence the god
Peers forth upon the highways of the world,
This new Copernicus we wonder at;
Cold as Apollo's marble, and as keen
To hearts like yours and mine; cold as cold Death;
Indeed I think that Death himself has not
The icy chill that curdles from this seer:
You know what roused our sorrow, it must be
Some ten years back, the darling of his home,
The babe with Life's first sweet fair breath upon
him,
Is taken suddenly; well, do we catch
The droppings of hushed tears, the least faint stir,
The slightest intimation of a man,
The softest echo of a father's voice;
Oh, not at all; indeed, I gathered from

A young practitioner, a friend of mine,
Doubtless a merry student when I speak,
Proteus was quite otherwise engaged,—
Dry human bones, the original skeleton
Wherein man capered level with the brute,—
Arrested the great man's supreme attention
When all his household idly mourned the loss
Of some poor little soul, who looked too soon
And feebly on that world which now revolved
Obedient to his sire : David, in short,
And David's weakness for domestic tears
Had given place to Solomon the sage,
Anointed king with thunders. What, you think
David did really mourn for Jonathan
With love surpassing the old love he showed
To the mere woman Michal? What, my friend,
You still believe the awful creed of some,
That when the flower of Israel, the great,
The princely soul that grew, and ever grew,
For all the thousand spites of circumstance,
Up to the ideal virtues which he loved
In men and women of the mighty Past ;
When the hard taxed magnanimous one, the real
Crown of heroic chivalry lay dead,
Warring upon the mountains for the king

Against the Philistines, not for himself,
Not for himself remember,—oh! forgive
The praise I cannot keep within due bound,
The praise in which you led and which I share,
If I may add my indignation too,—
When *he* went silent, the consummate harp
Of the rebel friend dropped also mute for once,
Shattered with sorrow and astonishment?
Well, if it did, what then? What if he grieved,
Grieves still a whole year gone to allay the loss;
The passing of one soul that feared him not,
That feared no whit the steel of Nature's brain,
The accomplished ease of talent; one that held
An aim for art and us poor women too
O'er the mellifluous slumber of a dream,
Above the twitters of Anacreon,
The babble of a Petrarch? What if he
Felt dazed a moment when that eagle soared
Over the mountains and away for ever?
Oh, yes, such blanks as these are apt to grow,
To grow for each and all of us no doubt;
However we think to thrust their memory
Back to oblivion. But wait an instant,
Wait but a few months longer, dear, and when
You see your hero reap his recompense,

Run o'er the handy notebook which he keeps
(Howe'er his mistress hide it from the world)
Alert for such misfortunes, duly sum,
Upon that catalogue we know so well,
Each drop of anguish laid upon the mound
Of his lamented rival ; when you hear,—
As you shall hear, I warrant, presently,—
Him claim the heart which held all Germany,
Say, every soul that climbs up to be free
In the pure virtues which we women hold
Or strive to hold untarnished from you know
All that we women suffer from wild men,—
When you shall hear him claim this heart, I say,
As though it was precisely his possession,
An undivided claim none may dispute :
When you shall see the wandering outlaw rise
Upon the royal throne and shape him firm
In wrested sovereignty above his friend
And his friend's children,—then surely confess
For all your noble magnanimity,
For all your patience face to face with greatness,—
Defects of Nature's Titan qualities,
Immunity of genius, oh ! I know
Each specious subterfuge of your weak fence,
Your English breath of Shakspeare and his brood,

You stand at least in this one estimate
Second in wisdom to your sceptic friend,
The woman of the world, who simply writes
The hard, hard truths which she was born to see
And take in sadly through her waste of years.

A PHILOSOPHER'S LETTER

GOOD morning, sweetheart ; just one line before
We kiss in the best way, and Berlin greets
Her eminently dull professor home :
Here I am housed at last, and thank God too ;
I have no cause to grudge this little round,
Which gives me one more look at our old friend,
And doubtless much to think on afterwards.
A pleasant drive we had from Eisenach
In perfect weather ; left the town, 'tis true,
Soaked out in ball of mist, a cloud which was
Quite lost, however, in triumphant blue
As we rolled up to Gotha : after that
Through Erfurt,—there, of course, he touched my
thought,
Our German pitted face to face with France,—
Through Erfurt ever on to journey's end,
October's sun had most things to himself,
Until he dropped one burst of passionate gold
Over that house, park, stream, and all the rest,

Just as we trundled, somewhat weary now,
Through city gates, guarded, ay, as of yore,
Into this quiet place : immediately
I stepped across to pay him my respects ;
The house was all ablaze, for as it chanced
The Grand-Duke was expected. Well, I was
Received in heartiest fashion, couldn't be more ;
And after some half-hour's chat alone
On anything, old times, my progress here,
The noble guest arrived. I was at once
Presented, and we sat down comfortably,
I seated on the right : no doubt, dearest,
These little trifles have their worth to you,
And you shall therefore have them : as for *him*,
He stood straight opposite, stood quietly,
As he is fond of doing, arms flung back
Behind him ; there he stood, helping us both
With casual interruptions ; truth to say
The Duke is rather deaf, and otherwise
Clearly much older ; how he will be missed
I leave you to imagine. I was forced
To follow mainly where he led or thrust
My contribution edgeways as I could :
Both wished to hear what I had seen and heard
In Paris ; among other things, I mentioned

(We'll skip the world of politics, my dear)
That English troupe whose fiery declamation
Stirred in me, as you know, you have my letter,
So much astonishment : both, it appears,
Knew well the name of Kemble, and no wonder ;
The Kemble soil breeds actors ; thick as mushrooms
They sprout up from it ; yesterday, for instance,
John was the general favourite, now his son
Charles leads the stage in London, what is more,
Has proved himself the first to try and hoist
His Shakspeare's drama dressed in comely English,
As suited the occasion, o'er the Channel
On to the boards of Paris ; well, that surely
(I write the old man's eagerness in prose)
Marks something to be proud of, and I'm glad
That I have seen it, told him of it too :
There we are one at least, my host and I,
And that's another something. Well, a point
Of conversation turned how Shakspeare would
Have borne what struck me then, what still I hold,
Most violent, outrageous wrestling with
His verse and manner : there, no doubt, I found
It somewhat harder to explain, convince
My noble audience : the odd thing is,
I think I have not told you this before,

I crossed an English artist in the Louvre
Whose laugh fell pat with theirs ; the cry, he said,
Was all the other way : another star,
More piercing, more intense, a keener flame,
A Mars and Saturn rolled in one, it seems,
Bids fair to drive your Kembles from the field
Simply with spurt of genius. After all
My cockney may have jested, and he gabbled
Of course his native torrent. But enough ;
What brought most interest to them I think,
All Paris has rushed after Egypt's fleshpots,
Racine and king Corneille are now mere ghosts ;
La Muse romantique is the rage ; one hears
Effusions such as this I overheard
The other night when Kemble played Othello
With the true lion's roaring. "*Ah, voila,*
La passion, la tragédie. Dieu, que j'aime
Cette pièce, comme il-y-a tant de,"—O note this !
"*Remue-ménage.*" I think I hear you laughing ;
The Grand-Duke also laughed ; as for our friend,
He barely chimed with us ; looked even grave ;
Confesses Hugo's genius, likes his songs,
But thinks the man is writing much too fast,
Suspects, I rather fancy, there will be
In this strange importation of the oak

From Stratford meadows to the glebe of Paris
A certain loss of beauty in the type :
The inflation will be there, the rugged bole,
O for a world of twists, contortions endless ;
Luxuriance shall have a right good fellow
To keep him company beneath hale skies ;
But hardly we may hope to witness here
The monarch of the forest as he towered
Over the realm of great Elizabeth ;
Perfected sovereignty from base to crown,
Primeval roots delved deep in virginal soils,
The exquisite proportions of the mass,
The lightness of the curling leaves, the strength,
The tenderness and grace wherewith he caught
The kisses of the morning through his tops,
Gathered full summer's glory in repose,
The majesty of winter ; most of all,
The unconscious ease which makes him stand for ever
A part of England only as herself
Stands forth a vital limb of the wide world,
A watch-tower of the nations : that's his view,
Or something like it, for you know he loves
Their poet much, loves him perhaps still more
That sister star he throned has long ago
Been setting from her place, and now, they tell me,

This very year, poor planet, on the wane,
Fallen from our earth for ever. Well, the world
Has still to bring his prescience to the proof ;
I merely marked the fact this soul of France
Breaks to the birth this month a brand new play
On Cromwell and his thunder, dared a hope
He'd treat John Milton levelled to the prose
Of England's candlelight a trifle better
Than Voltaire served his master Shakspeare's Muse ;
A diplomatic touch ; he smiled his doubts.
But, heavens, I'm turning critic after all,
Professor to the backbone : briefly, then,
Save the one little stumbling-block, I mean
This deafness, all jogged happily enough ;
An evening to remember. But you ask,
Have possibly been asking more than once,
How is the man in health and looks? Ah, well,
Just picture him much as you saw him, ay,
A good ten years since ; strong even as then ;
Brimful of energy and youth and fire :
Hardly a wrinkle on the brow ; head still
Fresh with its glorious fringe, electrical :
Complexion clear and bonny : yes, perhaps
A trifle stiller in his ways ; something
Let's say of Autumn in the whole effect ;

But generally just the man he was,
A head so brave and honest, sound to the core,
A heart, ah ! well, well, so much just *der alte*,
One really quite forgets all this blind Europe
Babbles about his rank with upturned eyes
Of vague astonishment : what eyes *he* has !
His outlook on the world of letters now,
Despite his weight of years, surpasses all
My boldest expectation, yet I am
No ordinary reader, as you know :
The last original his eagle stare
Has pounced upon hails from the stubborn hills
Of Scotland, home of Burns : the canny fellow
Sent him last May, it seems, some book on Schiller ;
His name has slipped me, but from all I hear
We are to have a Cromwell of the pen,
Cold steel, warm blood for weapons, heart of flame,
The Hebrew's conscience unimpeachable,
Flashed suddenly across the obdurate world ;
What must Achilles do but promptly wave
I know not what for welcome back again ;
Turn the Scot's head, when quite too probably
He overrates him now : at least our author
Has chosen for his text the very theme
Most like to touch the heart of Pollux ere

It calls his brain to judgment ; but, of course,
I hardly told him this. Well, well, this does
Not sum up half, a quarter of my debt :
We meet as friends ; in that one simple word
You have what makes this visit what it is ;
No trace of ceremony ; indeed I know
He rates your own wise William and his works
Cheaply enough : in serious truth I am
Just one more cobweb-builder near the clouds,
At whom Dame Nature gently smiles as she
Trips on her open journey : I have tried,
Sought yesterday, for instance, to make plain,
In a loose offhand way across the wine,
All that we prosy plodders did was, well,
To brush more clear of tangle the strange path
We all of us must take as we press through
Soul's endless resurrections, than discover,
With something of surprise, ourselves at last
Bigger as we look back again. Ah ! Mary,
You should have seen old Nestor's eyeballs
flash ;
He was alert, trust him ; not to be caught
Thus napping over walnuts ; no, the grains
Of excellent sanity I still possess
Are kept despite the tedious furniture

Of academical wisdom ; he likes me,
Takes to your husband, if you like that better,
And tolerates my hobbies as he may ;
Ah ! well, perhaps I buttress some of his,
At all events admire him none the less
For his sweet toleration ; in good truth,
All love him here and spoil their favourite too ;
Whereby maybe he loses : I should add
The son and father seem on excellent terms ;
All is just as it should be in the home ;
You'll like to hear this ; yes, it is a pleasure
To see them both together. By-the-bye,
Riemer and Zelter were with him that evening
I mentioned first, but tucked themselves away
With prudence possibly, at least with kindness,
In the adjoining salon : Zelter hails
Over the hills from Nürnberg, where he spent
Three profitable hours hunting down
Old Albrecht Dürer's grave ; it strikes me now
We could have helped him, eh ? Of course he is
Just crammed with praises of the dear old place,
Calls it the heart of Germany, declares
He never walked a town more full of meaning,
More touched with all you loved when still a
girl :

The heart of Germany ! I think it is
The heart of something better. Come, come ! I
Must end this scribble in right earnest. One
Last word, prompted by your dear last to me,
Perused in Brussels : folk in Paris, well,
Rig themselves much as we Berliners do
In Friedrich Platz. I noticed all about
Women wear pretty bonnets made of straw,
With big white bows most formidably stiff :
I think, however, I have not come back
Without a hint, a daring touch or two,
To mark your fresh appearance in the Spring :
At least I'll stake the promise. Yes, I know
My letters have been dull, not quite the stuff
Vienna waved you home,—how the years run,—
When David and Lablache made the blood gallop,
Turned your old pedant's flint to flame. Well,
well,

We'll try to end this letter your own way,
With Weimar warm around us and the glow
Of an Autumn's perfect evening. Ah ! my Mary,
But then you see I've scarcely been somehow
Quite the old self all through this Paris trip :
Yes, you may tell Immanuel—he seemed
To have some doubt upon it when he wrote—

Even distinguished fathers like his own,
Who compass all the world in one big letter,
An Omega the world for the best part
Values the cipher of a fool's blockhead,
Are subject with the dunces to old age :
Yes, I am getting on in years, which makes
Me wish the more to get back home to you.
Expect Odysseus back at latest then
Early on Sunday : for my part if I
Can make it Saturday be sure I will ;
But tell this not in Gath,—rather proclaim
Monday the day when all Berlin shall see
The main prop of her learning,—lest, why lest,
The geese and ganders flocking up between,
We fail to get one Sabbath quite alone ;
Oh, how I want to have it,—kiss and hold
You once more really in these arms. There, there !
Is that enough for you ? It ought to be,—
It shall not be, however ; for I am
In a most gracious temper, it appears,
And have a gentle postscript to append ;
A postscript you may thank good Zelter for
And all his Nürnberg nonsense, if you like :
Ah ! well, do you remember still those lines
I wrote for you,—you know the when and why,—

Or ought to know : let me repeat once more
The last two verses now and end my prose ;

When never a human word will sum
The joy which our love feels ;
When every syllable hangs dumb,
Nature undoes her seals.

Adds in abundance her best speech ;
The dearest, nearest sign :
We kiss ; soul floods across the breach,
My heart breaks into thine.

A PRIMA DONNA'S TESTIMONY

SOME children are born singing, I believe,
Straight from the scattered egg-shell : I was one :
Most have about them something of the birds,
Then why not just a few their speech as well ?
At least I cannot bring to mind the date
When the young life and warbling did not run
Yoke-fellows hand in hand. Oh, merry days,
Mornings of April, July evenings, when
A pair of lovers,—that was puss and I,—
Made a lodge window start and ripple with
The prattle of our voices. What, my dear,
Am I to think those lessons quite in vain ?
Was it a poor lame solo all the time ?
Not that I wonder much you never tried
To follow your rash mistress when she dared
To break a lance with the inviolate,
To rouse our friend the greenfinch o'er the way
With some faint imitation of the style
In which he called the Spring back to his cage,

Stirring at last from an impassioned breast
The whole relentless torrent of its free
Indomitable rapture : there at least
You showed your wisdom ; nay, I frank admire
Your prudent abstinence : but not one sound
Caught from the busy street we watched so long,
Not one shrill whistle snatched from drum and fife
Which set our veins a-flutter thumping by,—
Was it on market days? What, nothing then,
Not one soft echo murmured after me,
Trilling our dear folk's ditties : surely, pet,
That was too bad of you. And yet, it seems
I have but love to offer you, playmate,
Heart of rare memories, no blame at all :
Sleep your last sleep in peace. Yes, even then,
Ah ! earlier still, when the mere baby tripped
And tumbled in the open woods and fields,
Something had fledged within me. I have learned
But little from mankind of that I know
To be the eye and apple of my art,
That which I dare to speak of as my gift,
So plain has One admonished from the first
All that I ought to strive for, ought to keep
In quiet holy trust. Surely it is
Thus ever with the man and woman born

To lift upon some rarer eminence
The expression of love's spirit and its flower :
The hand which pushes pushes from within ;
It comes not from the world, how should it come ?
At most we learn from our apprenticeship
The alphabet of patience, learn i' the schools
The art to school ourselves, the power to scan
And measure steps our feet have still to climb
With pains incredible ere we behold
The station where consummate art shall teach
As with authority. One prompts a hand
Of the trembling student, one the untrained voice ;
Another more prophetic moves to spur
The humble essayist across the bourne
Of light ambitions into the full gaze
Of the entire world's arena, there to test
And lift soul to its rank : mainly we learn
To pass with ease and smoothly o'er the keys
Of whatsoever instrument is ours
To clarion the deliverance : that which breathes
The breath of life through it bides with ourselves,
Nought but plain inspiration here shall teach
Our effort anything. Therefore I know
That I have most to thank God, for that He,
Already in this life a lonely woman,

Has yet vouchsafed the undeservèd warmth
Of the very master : out of the dumb crowd
One man at least His loyal minister,
Prophet of that great Church invisible
We artists cherish. Oh, how the fresh touch
Widened the vision, thrust aside its weakness,
Stablished the faith whereto I stretched the ambition,
Yet fell so oft behind, uplifted me
With sense of kindred aspiration, courage,
Written and sealed in friendship. Oh, how good
And gracious He has been, how wonderful,—
Though He has now veiled life with death, and left
me

Only a memory, a recollection
To seek to live by. After him and those,
The one or two I've found most near to him
In dignity of soul, in strength and beauty,
Such as great art bestows, I think that none
Has given to me so rich a tutorship
As Nature's own most gentle choristers,
The congregated birds : out of her heart,
Pulse of her brimming life, they break from her
Exultingly,—who sing not for a prize,
Who teach yet ask no fee, but, like the child,
Timid before the stranger and the bold,

Have all the more to teach us since they give
All that they have for nothing : in their wake
I also would attune me liberally ;
Reveal one voice as native to the vast
Cathedral silences, which man has raised
Wherein to worship (precious symbols they
Of the yet nobler fane which roofs in all),
As that sweet treble to the woodland haunts
It hallows beyond measure. Yes, I know,
A thousand times I know I was not born
To live and die the prima donna only,
To parcel out myself upon the stage ;
To feel at last, perchance, e'en with the rest,
That which is rarest in my art's attainment,
That next to which my talent sinks as nothing,
Ay, and the voice which crowns it slowly change,
Slip from the spirit well-nigh unawares,
Leaving the common rivalry of tongues,
The restless strategy of conscious art,
The love of praise, the jealousy, the pride,—
All that the thrushes taught me to unlearn
And cast aside for ever. True, most true,
That I have known what men do call success,
Have been the centre of much approbation,
Both wise and foolish, ay, beyond all meed,—

Which proves but one thing only, this, to wit,
How youth and love, which is the salt of youth,
Have stayed me through all dangers where I stand
And thank the many friends whose hearts have
 showered

Their praise on me far more than I deserve it.
Well, I have given also much in turn ;
Daily I learn to know it ; more perhaps
Than I could go on giving thus and live.
Oh, when the lark is fresh within us we
Can venture everything, even surpass
All that we dared to hope for ; then maybe
We can forget the strangeness of our choir,
Make the blithe soul ring clearly as a bell
Before the circling raptures of the crowd,
And barely mark their presence ; then we may
Throw wide the doors of our discovery,
And scarcely feel the sudden rent and strain
Of the soul's unloosened thunder, soar right up,
Free as the skylark o'er the shouting throng,
Conscious alone of sunshine and the blue :
It is not ever thus, it cannot be ;
Under the dazzled notes a nightingale
Waits for the opened windows of the darkness :
There is a voice which makes the twilight's hush

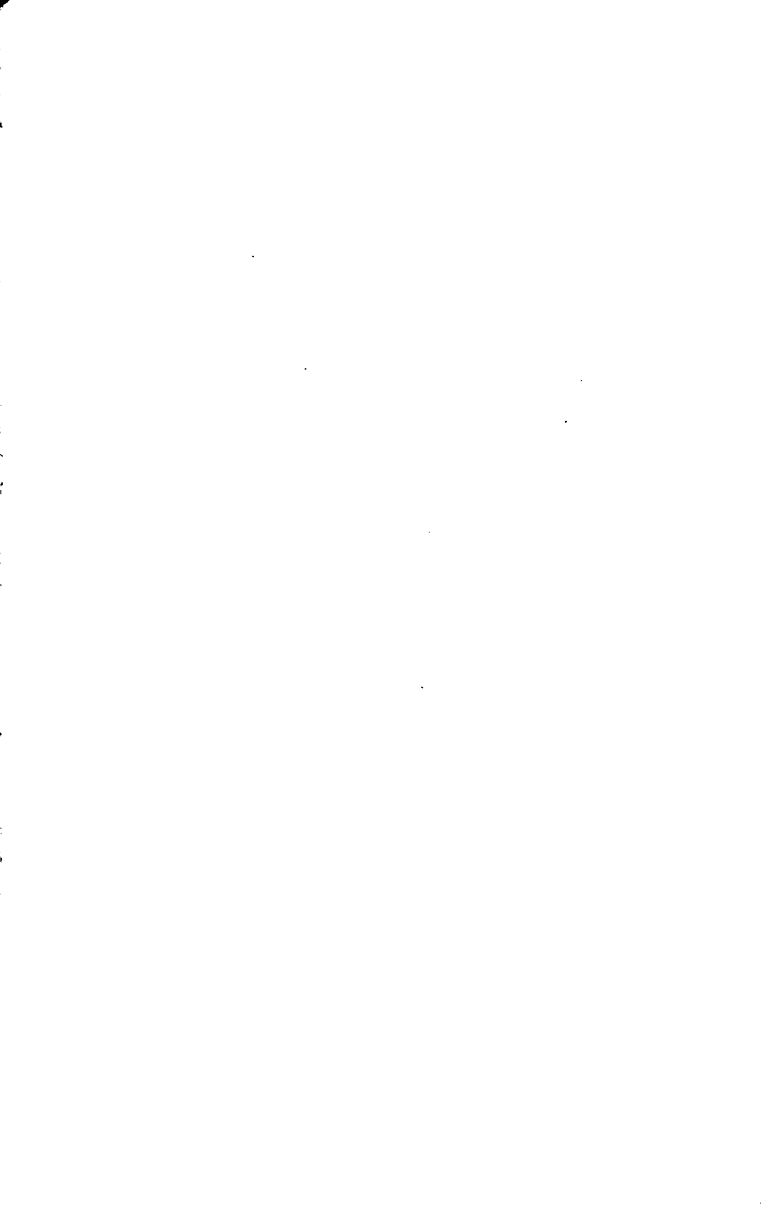
Speak through a passion which is born of yearning,
Whose anthem floods most strong when all the host
Of the woodland minstrels hide away in stillness,
When the bright sun is gone, when the whole world
Sleeps, rocked beneath the stars ; there comes a
moment

When the glad shout of life, the ecstasy
Breaks, sepulchred in mist : like Agatha,
The forest maid of my loved opera,—
Was it not she who let me first proclaim
And recognise my gift ?—we see a cloud
Hover before Love's face ; we mark the storm
Thicken across the muffled steppes of night ;
We shake before the whisper of a horn
From other huntsman than the God who waved
The gates of morning open on the hills :
We suffer, suffer even more perhaps
For the great joy that came to us at first
With budding salutations. Whom God loves
He chastens well betimes : how simply true ;
Only from the bruised cluster bursts the wine :
Only the earthquake lifteth up the mountains :
I feel it, I have felt it,—best of all,
I thank Him for it. Ah ! the mighty rain,—
How it has broken all the tyrant shell,

Stirred the soft folds which lay i' the dark beneath,
To float in emerald above the wound
And bleed with stars of brightness : it has shown,
Shown me more clearly still that which I keep
Safe for the Giver. Therefore I do take,
Have taken my resolve, and, like the birds,
Will bind me simply to the life which is
Most fitting to the spirit of that trust,
Most fitting to the love with which I take it ;
Lest, aiming at some mark beyond my grasp,
Yearning to teach the world beyond my strength,
I lose the power to give e'en that I have
Purely as God has given it to me :
What ! shall not this suffice ? Oh, womanhood,
Ye who may never throb with darling hopes
Discovered in fulfilment, ye whom God
Has crowned with other pains than those which break
Into the glory of your first-born babe,
Have courage still, my sisters ; never forget
That mother in yourselves whom sorrow's touch
Shall waken to the finer exaltation,
That wondrous guardianship which fences in
The fairness of your souls, which holds unscathed
Above each hurricane the little child
Your own pure mother laid upon the world,

A miracle of beauty. Oh, may we
Move to the distant setting with the dawn
Still present in our eyes, deliver up
The temple of Love's spirit all unstained,
And in the evening shadows, to the last,
Still know the freshness of the rising sun.

PART II



AN EARLY SCHOOLMAN'S DISCIPLE

(A.D. 880-900)

I WHO have listened to the master's voice,
And hold myself advisedly the man,
Very *discipulus* he led with him
Down from the heights of Eden to the vale,—
This scene terrestrial ambitious sin
Hath blurred and blotted of the ancient smile
Wherein it stood confederate with God,—
Then on and over all the grievous film
And glamour of the pestilential dew,
Through the untainted halls of Nature grasped
Ungrossly for a temple where He hides ;
Up the serene ascent, seven stages more,
From Sabbath unto Sabbath ranged above,
Where the purged human soul, with mighty lift,
Storms lustrous to the inaccessible eye
And union of all essence, till at last,
As airs do seem to drown in the sun's wealth,
Yet spread awake to gather up the gold,

Each soul shall come to be the invisible car
And carriage of the Godhead manifest :
I who have conned the fair immortal page
Writ in five books, one book for every sense,
Crowned by the sense of all most spiritual,
(*Est enim luminosum aliquid*
In oculis,—wise Saint Augustine saith),
Who watched the colours of heaven's upper prime
Tingle one precious moment on this earth,
Flash out beyond a soul truth's perfect sphere,
Round it to the majestic stature of
Her infinite habitations : he who came
(As once Elijah from the dismal waste)
Forth from his island rocked by northern seas
Unto the softer climate of the Frank,
E'en to the gracious court of our wise king,
And shaped him here a Patmos free and bold,
Impregnable against the assault of Time
And all the batterings of this cruel age :
I who have followed him ; now that the heavens
Are hectic with discoloured prodigies,
And pestilence stalks naked o'er the town,
And Christ is driven off with scarce a blow
From many a sacred wall and lowly shrine,
Plundered by greedy fangs of all their wealth,

Sucked of their treasured wisdom ; when the Dane,
Grown lusty with the crimson drench wherein
He floated Doerstadt, Rouen, Fontinelle,
Lays North and South yet wider nets, as though
To huddle in one craft all Christendom
And pick her to the bone ; when from the East
The shudder of a wail, a muffled roar,
Comes trembling down the wind, and men cry
loud

Dread Attila hath split the doors of hell
And loosed his rout of demons once again,—
Innumerable as Autumn leaves, or crests
The billowed ocean driveth in his brawls,—
To hound all life together in one pit
Of horrid desecration. I who watch,
Here from this last safe corner of Christ's Church,
And see such things beginning thus to be,
While there is time and means vouchsafed to do,
While I have strength of heart in evidence,
Will write once more the message which he gave,
Clenching the wisdom of the Eternal Church
With all that tutored mortal Greece and Rome ;
Unfold the central glory of his page,
The Paradise that was and is to be
When all the wreck and rummage of these times

Hath passed away e'en as a dream which veiled
The everlasting Goodness. *Laus Deo.*

Albeit he observed that in the heavens,
This ancient roof above us pricked with lamps,
Whirled round gross earth's incumbrance at the
core,—

Despite all that the Greek Protagoras
And Eratosthenes have done to sound
The subtler tones and diapasons of
The spheric intervals, much still remains
And must remain obscure to human learning ;
Quis mensus altitudinem cæli ?
Who shall ascend Thy courts? Nevertheless
He held withal that only through quick sense,
These outward promptings of this difficult world,
Man cometh to his mind at all, and thence
Through the soul's letters, as the apostle saith,
Spelleth the invisible,—*pervenitur*
Per creaturam ad Deum. What need
Of illustration here? How otherwise
Was Abraham of old constrained to flee
Through heaven's assembled host, in tier arranged,
The faithful pilgrim of that Sun above
The dwelling of all suns : nor e'en, I trow,

In the brave firmament of God's own Book
 Thrust o'er the stubborn heart of man with yet
 More prodigal spaciousness,—lift up your heads,
 Ye everlasting gates,—did he pursue
 Less generous path, long since discovered by
 Origenes the master,—*O primus*
Inquisitor rerum well art thou called
 By him I name *primus primorum* now :
 Yea, probed continually beneath the crust
 And superficial fashion of its stars
 To find a jewelled worth, a hidden depth,
 The Spirit of all truth keepeth secure
 For such as walk more manly on his ways,
 Putting aside the playthings and the pipes
 Which lulled youth's tender heartstrings, as they may,
 With little childish tunes. Mark therefore well
 How graciously and slow from point to point,
 As the child follows a maternal hand,
 He moved within that Temple's holiest,
 Beheld the secret place of the Most High God
 Shadowed with wings of cherubim, which are
 The causes prime and types original,
 The articulate image of His worth ; for He
 Is ever one with darkness as the wise
 Most eloquent Areopagite hath said,

Writing to Dorotheus. Wherefore, first,
I put the question which containeth all,
"Was Adam made in God's similitude?"
Not so, assuredly;—how had he fallen
From where he stood consummate at the birth
Facing the morning stars and Lucifer,
Who is the smile of Christ upon their gladness?
Nay, read the voice more close, who readeth this,
As he read : *Faciamus hominem*
Ad imaginem nostram,—weigh every word ;
No rash identity observe, which were
Incredible for anything create,
But ample preposition interposed
As with the thought express ; "Come, let us make
Man with an infinite capacity
To mirror the whole world Time hath revealed,
Nature through all her parts from base to crown,
From vital breath to Spirit and the idea,
(Pure microcosmos in his Plato's speech),
To shape him the vast temple, thus to rise
And contemplate the intrinsic loveliness,
With praise and adoration on his lips,
Of our Eternal Presence." Must we hold
That with the efflorescence of this life,
The first soft breath of God on Adam's brow,

The unspeakable birth of man, this bodily frame
 Compact of flesh and bone took solid form?
 How had the soul, thus cribbed and sore confined,
 Enveloped Nature's fulness? Rather hold,
 Ambrosius and Origen instruct us here,—
 But now as ever *unusquisque suo*
Sensu abundet,—let each have his way,—
 Augustine hath for once most plainly erred,
 Thinking God made such sordid bodies serve
 The occasion passably with angels' food,
 E'en as He shoed and clothed the Israelites
 Full many a year, who else had wandered on
 Most beggarly indeed. Touching which point
 Methinks Ambrosius hath right who saith
 That man's august original nakedness
 Was no mere transient flash of the tingling flesh,
 But the apparent glory which shall mount
 E'en at the last,—a radiant spirit armed
 With matchless pinions for celestial flight,—
 Had the soul only fledged them. Ah! there creeps
 The shame which ousted Adam long ago
 From Paradise and all the apostle once
 Fronted in the third heaven: he looked upon
 The golden doors, gazed wistful up toward
 The central Tree of Life,—the eternal fount

Whence Virtue flooded north, south, east, and
west,

But would not enter in or taste thereof,
Walking with God in spirit and in truth,
As Enoch after him. Alas ! so fair,
So blissfully entrancing shone that world
Of the wide beneficent Nature, he was fain
To deck himself with softness in her arms
Nor dream of aught beyond her and the sense
She soon discovered for him in his slumber :
Dormit Adam et fit Eva. There lurks
The germ and increase of this ancient wrong ;
He took for wholesome cheer the natural good
Which came with ne'er an effort, all uncrowned
With noble virtue ; and fond easy man,
Just when the sweetness blossomed in the ripe,
(*Quædam elatio*, Augustine adds
The fitting word, as ever is his wont),
Why then he slept his birthright most away
Steeped in the luscious senses (notice here
How the Greek substantive, *αλθησις* termed,
Aptly betrays the ardent feminine) ;
Slept sound enough, I warrant, till one day
He woke to find the creature whom he sought
And had been seeking after all the while,

Though still half unaware, real as himself,
 Flesh of the very marrow, ready framed
 With the exquisite accordance of each part—
 (Mark here the scathing irony of Heaven,
 Wherein God gave to Adam all that blessed
 His ignorant flocks with wanton gambollings,
 Dividing the waste waters of his hunger,
 That they might clash the more in overthrow),—
 To consummate with touch and open eyes,
 Expectant and invasive as his own,
 All that his folly listed,—and he fell ;
 Faith ! had he never fallen and escaped
 The full sad burden of his punishment,
 'Tis easy to surmise his sloth and strange,
 Most strange light-heartedness (*fatuitas*
 An ancient Father justly styleth it)
 Had clipped and hedged him fast enough within
 Some straitened village Eden, shut beyond
 The grand horizons of the very temple,
 The forecourts of the King : nay, it is rather
 Clearly writ out for such as care to see,—
 How else had Scripture wholly failed to attest
 The limits of that first beatitude ?—
 Adam ne'er passed through Paradise at all,
 But swerved aside, bent on the dubious trail

Of One long since excluded any share
In those eternal gardens ; stepped his way
Till the squat serpent stung him with blunt eyes
Of downright rankness ;—*ab initio*,—
Ay, from commencement,—*erat homicida*,—
Satan had set his mouse-trap : what is more,
As though to storm truth's entrance with a flash
Of final certitude, our Blessed Lord
Hath set the precious gem in parable,
Fitted as only He doth fit such jewel
With absolute precision ; thus it runs :
Homo quidam,—(note, Adam's name doth fix
The father of the race, no man assured
We may depict as Abraham or Lot,
A man of varied traits and characters,
Conjoined with individual qualities),—
Descendebat,—was on the downward path
(*O facilis descensus* now as then !)
From Sion's splendour,—*ab Jerusalem*,—
Bound for the stronghold which so fierce withstood
The race elect of God,—*in Jericho* ;
Brief, had forsaken the eternal rock,
The city on a hill, where flashed the Lord's
Majestic House snow-white against the blue,
And ambled off alone down narrow lane

And dangerous thicket, lost to everything
 Save some mean paltry business : thereupon,
 As any man of sober sense at home
 Had prompted in his ear, had he but turned
 When first his ass set off, he falleth in
 With folk these byways fattened, lusty thieves,—
Incidit in latrones sure enough,—
 Who stripped him well of all that Sion gave ;
 Not merely purse and money, but (mark now
 This palpable insurrection of the truth)
 Of e'en the sumptuous raiment clothed wherein
 He undertook the journey. There he lay,
 Half dead with wounds and shame, till Christ at last,
 Who is the whole world's Good Samaritan
 (At least all reverend scholars chime in here)
 Healed the grave wounds with ointment of His gift,
 Repaired the grievous plunder. After this
 Most open extrication of truth's core,
 'Tis clear no room for solid doubt remains
 That long ere Adam kissed the eloquent eyes,
 Beheld two souls absorbed in sinuous flesh,
 (Girdled, so Scripture runs, in *tunica*
Pellicæ : mere shining skins these are,
 No skins of sheep, as Epiphanius thought)
 And all the King's apparel snatched from one,

Wounded and maimed in the side, why he, false
knave,

Was miles already on the road which led
From Paradise direct to the dark lair
Where suddenly the latent thief would catch
Our traveller hard napping by the way,
And yoke him with a pretty tale of woes
To think upon and weep through afterward :
Small right hath he, forsooth, to round him now
And charge poor woman with the sorry trick
She played, when, if the desperate truth would out,
(St. Hieronymus doth lead us here)

He was the first to challenge her to come
And share his dalliance as she only could,
How much his troubles thereby grew the more ;
Certes, all she did then,—give each their due,
As saith the apostle,—was with loyalty
To entertain her sovereign lord's designs,
As eager Nature prompted : ay, methinks,
The boldness of St. Paul was none too bold
When writing on this very point to Rome,
As though the woman's sin had left his mind,
Had ceased to be, or haply, with her woes,
Quite fallen in abeyance ; as though Adam
At least were the main culprit after all,

He thundered, — “By one *man* sin stained the world.”

This is the doctrine our *magister* taught,
Set tersely here for uninitiate ears,
With but a glimmer of the pearls he swept
Into the heavenly compass of his book,
Unfolded in five spheres, as hath been said :
This is the gleanings from that harvest reaped
Out the fair cornfields of man's ancient prime,—
Wherein he spoiled the famous treasure-house
Of Greece and Rome, even as Moses spoiled
Old Egypt's land of all its sickled glory,
All wholesome arts and knowledge, leaving her
To founder with the rubble in the abyss
Of godless desolation : nor withal
Spared he the finer tilths, the abundance stored
By the holy Christian Fathers, Origen,
St. Gregory, Augustine, Chrysostom ;
But loving all, yet ever loved still more
The authority whereon each doth subsist
As blessed pillars of Christ's ample Church,
And rank in sacred Wisdom's hierarchy,—
To wit, the Book which is God's word to men,
And reason first and fairest of His gifts,

Standing in Nature's scale of precedence
Above authority. This is the substance
And deeper language of his harmonies,
Which drive, ay, as the chaff before the wind,
The childish tale which soothed man's sucking years
With echoes of a Paradise on earth,
And celebrate with everlasting tones
The garden that awaits the sons of God,
Which Adam looked upon, but never entered,
The abode of Heaven's illustrious conversation,
Seat of the pure and lowly, whose gates flashed
Ineffable glory when Christ flung them wide ;
The temple where man comes to his full stature,
Sees the whole world once more as God beholds it,
Shorn of the shadows sin hath sown and nourished,
The evil and the good in sweet concurrence,
The universe His voice of melody :
Which neither eye hath seen or ear hath heard
As they shall see and hear when God hath wiped
All tears away and sorrows, yet looketh on
E'en now afar, as also Dives looked,
O'er the surrounding flame of his desires,
On Lazarus in Abraham's soft bosom :
Before whose threshold ancient memory,
The cherubim which faceth still the East,

Hath fixed a shining sword to hold the way,—
 A sword no man may change or set aside,
 Which pointeth ever to the Tree of Life,
 Till all be gathered in the Truth thereunder :
 This is the anthem Wisdom cries aloud
 To these dark later days, when the whole world
 Seems to draw near His mighty consummation,
 So strange and full of signs unroll the years,
 The thousand almost over since He came :
 Hark to the voice of Love from His own Church ;
Et ubi corpus est,—where Truth is found,
 Which is the worthier body of things seen,
Illic congregabuntur aquila,—
 There flock the souls who mount on eagles' wings,
 And stretch to take His kingdom now by storm,
 Where all in Christ shall be one man, where none
 Shall marry more, be given more in marriage ;
 Whither the ransomed shall return with songs
 And everlasting joy upon their heads,
 And see the excellency of the Lord,
Et Deus omnia in omnibus. Amen.

A NOTABLE PAINTER EN VOYAGE.

(A.D. 1521.)

My glad and wholesome service to you, friend ;
Honoured by me, esteemed no less by all
Hale German hearts, astir with the new message ;
Much joy it gave me thus to hear from you
Such welcome tidings of the cause, and how,
Despite the ceaseless malice of Christ's foes,
This worthy doctor still doth press through all
Repugnancies to drive Heaven's business to
A glorious issue : God be praised therefor.
In sober faith, I had set down my heart
And gratitude some while agone, but have
Been sorely teased of late with body's ills,
Plucking the courage both from hand and head ;
Whereof the seeds were laid, I clear surmise,
By one most searching fever, which, alack,
Caught sudden hold of me some three months since

In Zeeland : thus the piece of mischance fell :
You know how I lurk ever on the watch,—
'Tis thus alone, I say, we artists piece
The perfect mould together,—for the slip
Which starts the ordinary smooth of Nature,
That rank or disarray which all perceive,
Betrays, in short, some new particular,
Haply some odd presentment of those old ;
Disturbs, at least, where aught of life remains,
Our dusty acquiescence with fresh qualms :
Well, last November : ay, it must have been
Soon after my return from Köln,—'twas there I saw
The grave and relics of St. Ursula ;
Received at last, for all my much ado,
The imperial confirmation of our pension ;—
No sooner safe at Master Plankfeldt's, settled
To Antwerp hospitalities and work
At portrait after portrait,—work, Heaven knows,
May sweep abroad my fame, yet barely wins
Me doits to live and work by,—ah ! friends paid
Me otherwise in Venice,—than the news
Is bruited everywhere, some monstrous fish,
A whale of bulk unknown, the busy storm
Had stranded on the shores of Zieriksee ;
There it lay flat, must lie a good half year,

All Zeeland quite incompetent, it seemed,
To pitch the monster back or otherwise
Relieve her coast of this unsavoury morsel :
Which tidings so evoked a greediness
Of vision in me, the old itch to make
Report still clearer with plain charcoal lines,
Despite the year's inclemency, I strapped
Pack once again to horse, and started north.
We took the sea at Bergen, but, it seems,
Were doomed to misadventure from the first ;
For, after grievous cold and lack of fare,
We found us at Arnemniden suddenly
More grave bested, ay, though upon the point
Of hooking fast dry land ; some hulking craft
Crushed foul athwart, and with tremendous lurch,
A stiff gale blowing in conspiracy,
Toppled us out to sea, hands left behind ;
The skipper, cabin-boy, myself, a friend,
Two wives the crew all told : nay, what was worse,
The master stood there daft, seemed most intent
To drown us all with bluster ; thereupon
I hitched the craven fellow half aside
And dealt some counsel gratis, ay, from us
Mere landsmen, prompt and eager there to serve
His orders with obedience under God :

This helped him to his wits, and hard we set
To hoist some stretch of canvas, managed thus,
After a world of pains, to brace the ship
And fetch her back to moorings,—thus at last
Drove into anchorage : yet this ill-luck
Seemed but a trifle near the main mishap,
Which was and is, that when we hailed the Veere
And Zieriksee, bethought ourselves how best
To stand with the occasion, there we found
The wind with tide at beck had proved more strong
Than the whole country-side,—with luscious jaws
Had gripped Leviathan and swallowed him :
Briefly save for a draught or two I made,
A count whereon I hold me most in debt
To Middleburg, a place most rich in art ;—
You ought to see its costly Abbey stalls
And gallery of stone ; but all the town
Appears aptly enough to sketch, most strange
The open land there sits tucked underneath
The banked off sea-line ; also I should mention
A study made of some most curious beast
Hauled from the brine, they tell me, with four feet
And two big tusks, dropped straight from mouth like
prongs ;—
Save for these mercies I brought chiefly back

This plaguy sickness, which doth go to steal
The strength of half my days, changing dear work
Into a brute's dull load ; but let that pass :
And now this fishy tale doth mind me of
A most rare bone I handled August last
In Brussels, big as though 'twere fashioned out
Of square-built masonry, most beautiful ;
It must have run a fathom's length, and weighed
Some hundredweight, whereof the accurate form
I jot for you on slip herewith enclosed :
Ah ! Brussels is the place to dally round ;
A brave town-hall it hath, roofed with carved stone
Most cunningly devised, a labyrinth
And fountains to the rear of the king's house ;
Also beast-garden excellent : whereof
I noted the main figure : here I saw
The picture held to be the workmanship
Of Luke the Evangelist : with all respect
I will not vouch tradition, this the more
I failed to note thereon immoderate zeal
Or signal patience ; yet it bore plain marks
Of rude antiquity my servitor
Seemed careful to expose : I must however
(Pardon the predilection as you may)
Confess with simple frankness all these sights,

Add all the crosses, dreams, and prodigies
My eyes have ever witnessed, drop still short
Of certain other marvels there set out,
Marvels it seems the Spaniard hath come by
From this new golden island late discovered
Somewhere across the main : never have I
Beheld such strange contrivances of man :
I mention from a host of rarities
A sun all gold, one fathom broad, a moon
Of equal size all silver, two winged birds
Shaped with pure feather stuffs most exquisite,
A green the like I never met before,
The beaks and eyes bare gold : the monstrous head
Of some huge reptile all of beaten gold ;
Therewith the weirdest clothing of some tribe
That dearly loved vermilion ; bed-quilts too
With feathers interwoven of dazzling hues :
But then, it would appear, in this new land
The very creatures, all of kinds most strange,
Receive a strength and colour unsurpassed
By any found among us hitherto.
As for the art these treasures certify,
I may just instance,—this it was, I think,
Most did astound me, who myself have been
Apprenticed early to the goldsmith's craft,—

The marvellous proficiency attained
No less in rich design than in the use
And disposition of the precious ore
From its original flux : one fish there was
Whose every scale was gold alternately
With silver in most absolute precision ;
A feat, I dare avouch, hath never yet
Been rivalled by our best artificers :
In all my life I never felt so keen
An exaltation as I took from this
Most sudden glimpse, say, revelation from
A world of cultured habit like our own,—
Yet heretofore shut from us,—an estate
Whereof we cull at most some vagrant droppings :
Ay, even in this first display, I grant
Most liberal in what pertains to war,
Beside the symbols of pure ornament
And superstitious custom I perceived
The solid enterprise of agriculture
And proved domestic life. Assuredly
Even this poor recital hath well served
To prick your senses with some intimation
How the whole vision worked on me. How cropped
All this and more beyond the ocean's desert?
How was this isle first peopled? Doth it then

Imply some new creation, or hath taint,
As I myself surmise, of Adam's sin
Perversely seized man here? Yet even so,
The instant thought pursues how folk discharged
So far from our embrace could have survived
The ancient flood's convulsion; fairy-like,
Most fairy-like the truth doth spring out of
These latter days, big with discovery
And rare adventure. Well, let this suffice;
Yet now I mind me of the main resource
Which set my pen your way, I can but smile
To think how this and that hath called me off
The task myself imposed, which was to give
Some recitation of the things which turned
The heads of half the men and women here
September last, I mean the Emperor's
Procession through this city: it is said
The main triumphal edifice which lined
His progress, with wide arches rich adorned
And built two storeys high, alone cost full
Four thousand florins; took, I know myself,
The painter's warehouse many a month to make:
In short, nothing was spared, and all the fête
Ran off glibly enough and glad, as I
Will prove, when next we meet, by print official

And many sketches taken at the time :
Here but a word or two on that which most
Encountered my respect, contributing
Rare nourishment to feed on afterwards,
When all the glamour had died out, to wit,
Some curious plays I saw enacted on
The very structure marked ; most various
They were, some quite devout and borrowed from
The Holy Scriptures ; chief for me I own
Were certain stolen from old Grecian lore
And quaint mythologies, wherein I saw
Fair maidens, most select in comely form
And simple manners orderly arranged
For dance and mystic rite : the scantest shift
They had about them, this I may aver,
Save that which Heaven vouchsafed our mother Eve
In Paradise : in truth (so gossip runs)
The king flung out the barest glance that way,
Deeming such revelations hardly trimmed
With the strict tenure of our creed : for me,
I must confess I found the Catholic
Lame prop to lean on set for once against
The edge and instinct of our whole life's work,
The faith of all its comments, which is just
To seek and ever seek among the shows,

Which only half give back the thing we seek,
That faultless whole, completeness every way,
Harmonious as the man woman framed
Long time ago by God for sinlessness :
Rather with absolute fitness I affirm
My good Italian friend, the Pope's friend too,
Hath marked consummately the scale of his
Hand's strength and manner. Love of Heaven ! shall
woman,

Swept though she be through every moon-white limb
From sole to the crowning glory, touch man's heart
With other resurrection than just this
Of wonderment and mercy? How it galls
To hear for ever thus confused the mask
Of death, whereon the lustful dote, to their
Unspeakable derision, with the fine,
The sweetest veil, the coverlid most fair
Of any whence the Spirit of the Pure
Opens from Nature with the very flower
Of human tenderness. I cannot think
Heaven gave us this but to some fruit of wisdom ;
First, haply, that we men might strive thereby
To grow more strong to front it undefiled
With gentleness, or at the least that we,—
Whose most approved ambition 'tis to hold

A mirror up to man of loveliness
And truth he ever is most like to pass
There where it strikes the closest, who would clear
The glasses of his eyes, reaching unto
Those hints of the consummate flashed above
The unsorted heap of Nature, rounding them
To their original and complete beauty,—
May learn from the sweet grace and exquisite form
Of womanhood laid bare in the due spirit
Our uttermost attainment, even the salt
And substance of our striving. Let me add
How I have seemed ere now to catch in dreams
Some prelude of that far-off symphony,
Those pure and great proportions which our art
But gropeth to as yet. Ah ! some one calls,—
Doubtless it is the wife, holding in check
Good Master Sterk, the imperial treasurer,
Chafing already at the circumstance
Which keeps him idle here with none at work
Upon his handsome portrait. Friend, believe me,
’Twas but a few days since I gave the fellow
A *Melancholy* gratis,—print, of course,
He cancels with his gift more precious still
Of spears from Calicut and some babe’s head
Limned coarse on linen ; thus good credit dries :

And thus I break from you abrupt at last,
Adding perchance some valedictory word
By way of postscript with to-morrow's seal.

The fearful news hath caught us : how shall I
Send you this writing now ? What change is this ?
What of my confidence ? What of the hopes
I fed and nourished ? How a word, a breath
Will dash us headlong from the dizzy height
And crown of our ambition, leave us sitting
Helpless before the iron-curtained Future,
Yoked as with chains to the immeasurable
Weakness of man and all wherewith he striveth ;
The instruments of art, the furniture
Of his most earnest and divine endeavour
Scattered around us now, mere toys, mere nothings ;
Sitting in solitude and utter darkness,
The incumbent world as silent as ourselves,
As overstocked with shadow. Late it was
Last night the messenger arrived : his news
Just struck us all (and there are many here
Who deeply love the man) with grief most bitter,
Most blank amazement. Ne'er before save once,—
Your heart will surely presage when that was,—
When the dear mother died, have I so felt

Unhinged and shattered ; how much more must you
Have felt this blow, which makes your friendship
bleed :

You, who have gazed upon his face, as I
Too fondly hoped, saving thus some clear glimpse
Of its worn strength and courage for weak souls
The world shall yet awaken : ay, was he
Not my soul's foster-mother ? Long years back
I drew a face of sorrows sick at heart :
I feel the hollow insurrection of those eyes
Burn through my being now, as I did then :
How could I otherwise ? Mercy of Heaven !
Who hath writ large the truth, thrown wide his heart
As this same Martin Luther ? Who shall now
Expound Thy Gospel, Lord ? stand up unblenched
Before the rule of death which blots Thy world,—
This most unchristian Papacy, whose weight
Of tyranny he hath rebuked so loud ?
Who shall rise up within the emptied place
With his most swift compassion, hold in leash
The mad hounds of disorder ? Through my tears
I see but one old man,—thou knowest, friend,
The knight of Christ I mean ; and yet e'en here
Surely the martyr stuff is lacking ; we
May look in vain and long enough to find

The old clear tones he used, the thunder fit
To shake dense clouds, giving these musty times
The touch of Spring once more. Reach me, dear
friend,

A plain straight word on this calamity :
For whether he still lives we know not yet ;
Whate'er the tidings be, they cannot leave
Our love more faint than now who fear the worst :
How should we not thus fear, who know so well
The beak of this same kite, which hath swooped down
On your good friend, caught fast in treachery,
And whirled off to a dungeon or the death.
Write us with all despatch,—and may your love
Find able words to heal our heart's farewell.

JOANNES KEPLER ON PROVIDENTIAL DISPOSITIONS

ALBEIT I will never aver, as some,!
The stars do mould and fashion all our life,
Will never hand unchallenged thus man's whole
Effective business to these deities ;
Crown them sole potentates, as who should say,
When some fresh stellar magnate steps from space,
(Have I not marked the glory ?)—*Heaven be praised,*
This war shall bring proud France upon her knees ;
Or, less ambitiously,—*This poem shall*
Shake the dull world with plaudits ;—or, as seems
To fit yet more with reasonable bounds,—
Coy Bridget shall be mine this very year :—
Though I will not stand prop for every whim
Wherefrom o'erweening man may thresh content,
Catching at every straw for sustenance,
Assuredly I hold that in these powers,
Through the wheeled motions of their vast array,

The veiled configuration of their paths,
There is profound significance, which doth
Transfuse and interpenetrate the whole,
Girding each mighty troop in fellowship,
As under one command : there is a charm,
A fascination in these countless eyes,
A harmony, wherein all lift a voice,
Which doth communicate and vaguely throb
Through e'en the densest matters, shaping them .
To one great purpose : how well otherwise
Shall God's bare casket with its weight of stars
Declare unfaltering the final gift ?
How might the web upon this outstretched woof
Of universe, this tapestry, which shall
Break with its veil before the temple's heart,
Reach the supreme design, unless a hand
Steady the shuttle which doth weave it there ?
Or, suiting thoughts to somewhat homelier guise ;
When my wife tends her pudding, she takes heed,
As every housewife should, to mete the flour
And measure plums and milk,—all that well goes
To build it handsomely, nor less with care
Doth nurse her oven at the proper heat,
Lest oven prove false traitor after all,
And hand her blackened cinders for the cake

To my astonished palate ; and in this
Illimitable bakehouse of the world
Shall we presume the several elements,
Traced momentarily upon the myriad spheres,
Are suffered now to fly about at will,
With just a random chance that finally
They may commingle, fuse within the flame,
Relieved the while of all their fulsome weight,
In such a way to shape before the Lord
His perfect shewbread ? Rather I would risk
Conjecture that this tabernacle's prize
Is even now in process, that no sweep
Of one least atom in the giant bowl
But runneth to the beat of Him who stirs
Designedly, who stands unscathed beside
The dizzy conflagration. True enough
The grosser essences perforce respond
Most sluggishly unto the finer thrill
Magnetically given : nor is it strange
That this unwieldy Earth, like some big whale
Submerged beneath the ocean, or dull ox
Before the master's goad, may seem at times
To drop asleep before the leading-rein,
As beasts which hybernate ; yet none the less
It lives and breathes, a creature sensitive ;

Is tickled through its countless apertures
Of stolid animation, is at least
No mere dead lump, as there are still wise fools
Who reckon even now. In such display
Is nothing strange : what rather doth awake
My open consternation is that man,—
The wondrous midget on this monster's back,
The parasite, which hath been crowned supreme
Above his drowsy lord ; this drop of life,
So exquisitely fashioned with a sense
To look before and after, to perceive
The rarer texture of the mighty warp,
Wherein he hath been stationed as a point
To round all to a focus,—even that he
Should stumble on without apparent guide
To help him through his journey : this observe,
Not merely in life's ordinary walk,
Where feet are apt to slide improvident
Of any chance footfall, but where he meets
Some obvious cleavage of the road, is taught
To travel more adroitly, seeking aid
From all who seem to hold clear right of way,
And sounded observation ; when, in brief,
He pricks his ears, is most particular
To heed the gracious carol of the spheres,

To catch the hidden prompter's nod behind
The overhanging curtain. Take my case :
What cause more suitable for sage advice,
For solemn balancing of all the threads
And tissues of the question than just when
A man will wed him for a second time :
Even a poor astronomer must live :
Hath other things to dream about than how
The clothes of Hans shall fit on little Karl,
To make two most repugnant ends converge
By that incalculable sleight of hand,
That trick some women have : well, well, their cue
Hath danced me off a pretty jig this time :
No sooner had they hit upon my thought
Than all were round a-cackle : in plain sooth,
If safety be the sprout of many heads,
Methinks I sat upon the very seat
Of Solomon himself. My niece it was,
The doctor's wife I mean, who set this stone
So merrily adrift, and little moss
It gathered on its helter-skelter down
To me at any rate. "If I must choose,
Dear uncle,"—ay, her words ran smooth enough,—
"I fancy I've the glove to fit your hand
With scarce the need to stretch for it, so near

It lies before you : who more suitable
Than the same widow friend of my dear aunt,
Good Mistress Krebbs, who played the nurse for her
So like a guardian-angel ? hath she not
Already knowledge of the household's ways,
Your scholar's habits, hath experience
In bringing up of children, as her brace
Of marriageable daughters surely prove ?
Were ever folk matched better ?" So she piped
Her counsel in the market, with like stuff ;
While I, for lack of wisdom, held, of course,
Nought could have trimmed more excellently with
The bent of the occasion. Down they went,
Three names in all, daughters with dam to lead ;
'Twas clearly wise, in case the widow failed,
To have the new move ready ; and observe,
Three was a lucky number : what is more,
It seemed discreet in such a serious quest,—
Such prudence, may I here with frankness add,
Is the pure fruit of patience, say, the bloom
Of my whole life's endeavour,—well, to show
The neighbours, who flocked up behind my niece,
I still kept ears alert to catch what hint
Their gentle solace for the case in point
Might pertinently furnish ; stood, in brief,

Quite ready still to thrust net's throw more wide
If Fortune basked outside it. Rest assured
There was no lack of candidates at least :
Each dame revealed her wonder : at the eleventh
I firmly closed the list, conceiving that
Transgression o'er such limit were to court
The jealous spleen of Heaven : faith probed me here,
Sealing the muster-roll in strict accord
With mighty precedent : which catalogue
(Suffice the phrase) of planetary orbs
Fixed in the field of vision, nought remained
But to observe which promised to revolve
About the sun with least apparent swerve
From the full circle's orbit. Well, all seemed
At first to run as though on liquid wheels :
The gentle dame inclined toward my suit
With reasonable courtesy, if just
Sufficient hanging back to make me praise
Her modesty or prudence, haply both :
Then all at once the stinging truth leaps out ;
These sighs, I took for gems, are found to be
Basest dissimulation,—well, at best
Compassion for the babes of my first wife,
With possibly some shadow of respect
For my nocturnal vigils. Here was one

Home-thrust to make me feel the hidden quick :
A swarm soon followed it : the widow lost,
I turned round to her daughters in reserve,
Who merely tossed me back astonished heads,—
Chid their own mother flat, who played this time
The part of special pleader. Well, the fourth
Was eminent in nothing save a face
Of such extreme repulsion, it had chilled
E'en the chaste dreams of my chit Ursula
With traces of its horror : at the bare
Aspect I hustled with a bow. The next
Seemed well enough, nay, in a special sense
Significantly touched with marks of grace :
Here, if at all, I felt the prompter's hand
Persuasive near my elbow, seemed to feel
A veritable pulse from soul to soul,
Start of the veiled attraction, not unlike
That undiscovered arm of Earth which sweeps
In falling bodies and bright asteroids ;
Whose laws and motions shall be fixed one day
No less, I bold surmise, than those which bind
Like soul to like : such was the force which led ;
Alas ! too weakly, but that I still watched
For some more open wink of Heaven's behest :
E'en while I dallied thus the still voice passed,

And in its place a thousand counterpleas
Were thrust once more toward half-dazzled eyes ;
Again I whirled in gentle company
My dance of will-o'-wisp. But why run o'er
The disappointments of the reel,—how this
Was riddled like a roadside hut with chinks
To let in every wind, which shudders war
Upon the human temple,—that preferred
To fan contempt behind her peacock's tail
Of vain accomplishments one day should plume
Within a ducal palace : surely all
Contumely and delay were meted out
In those three endless months, wherein I strove
To land my eighth fish safe ! Alas, the bait
Seemed just sufficient to prolong the zest
Wherewith the supple stranger plied the hook
To fling it off and leave our angler now
Prostrate with heels in air on river's bank :
With that rebuff, I trow, the pinch of pride
Still left of what was never a miser's store
Slipped trodden under foothold : I was fain,
Once more upon the track, to venture all
In doleful recitation of these ills
Unto the next in order, to strip nude
The rags of my discomfiture, ay, drink

The potion to its droppings. When all failed,—
When all my planetary disks had proved
To be mere comet flashes, what should rise
But that same gracious presence which I left
Marking the fifth disaster. Thither now
I bent in solitude, no mortal near
To check the kindling mercy where it fell ;
And straight was blessed with a most wholesome
wench,

Susannah Reuthinger, of middle age,
Comely to look upon, nay, better still,
Prepared to learn where old instruction fails ;
A ready housewife too, one clearly given
To cheer the home and match the children with
Some reasonable comfort. Here at length
This very tedious tale of courtship winds
To prompt conclusion, like enough prolonged
Beyond fair terms already ; still the doubt
Remains with me how it hath come to pass
That I have been by Providence so long
And sorely put : hath the bright gibbous moon,
Poised in the Bull's huge forehead, thus disposed
To these sad perturbations, or hath Heaven,
As seems to run more close with Holy Writ,
Ordained that woman oft should screen away

The nobler architecture of the spheres,
Drowning their music with a siren's voice,
To lead poor man adrift, yea, all who lose
These everlasting presences, which thrill
So constantly behind, loaded with power
To succour and restrain? Most patiently
The glorious stars have waited in their seats,
While I have thus been jostled to and fro
Through all the labyrinth, whither the whims
Of womankind do lead, ay, and will wait,
As they have waited thus six thousand years,
Until man's heart and mind have won at last
Each secret of their mission, each fair law
Wherein they range obedient as the rest
Of God's appointed children : to which work
With love and adoration I proceed.

PART III

G

A CERTAIN LAUGH

It dates its birth among those golden days
When urgent Love was still out travelling
With pilgrim's scrip and staff toward a shrine,
And all the path lay dashed with buds of Spring :
When hearts glowed deep in halo and in haze
Of mysteries each longed in turn to probe,
Striving and ever striving to divine
The ultimate glory of the soul's great gift ;
That truth of truths relieved of the last robe
Of gossamer e'en Heaven doth only lift
With awful tenderness. This flower-bell
Shot into life by no mere smile's expanse,
Nor yet with full-bloom laugh, but seemed to lean
Half-way between the two, full of the spell
Of both, as it were ; of such strange radiance
And thrill as though intent somehow to mean
Far more than either ; just the sweetest stir

Of melody, which gave the hush a curl
Of rippling joy long after it was through :
It must have been the unexpected sense
Of a new ecstasy which came to her,
And then upon those airs did thus condense,
Or rather with soft wings did so unfurl,
Blessing her lover with its sweet surprise ;
Which, though it brimmed dewlike and broke the
blue

That veiled the deeper language of her eyes
Into the wonder of the morning's grey,
Had such a treasury of things to say
It fain must seek an outlet otherwise,
And so it hovered bird-like in mid-air :
You know the way sometimes Albani's notes
Will nestle in the silence unaware,
And leave you at a loss how they stole there ;
But there they flash suspended none the less,
Sound crystals, shall we say,—electric motes ;
And then shade off so finely from the sky,
You only know they cease by suddenly
Perceiving the dull shock of emptiness
Which shuts them off for ever. Sphered like
this

Her sunbeam bubbled up, and clear unfurled

Its music in the confines of his world,
Oh, moment exquisite of lover's bliss,
Eclipsed at last, as all earth's glories are,
But christened in his heart of hearts a star.

A FATHER

I SPEAK not of myself, though I am his
Wife's brother, and have been assuredly
Staunchest Achates when that Titan brain
Stopped work or holiday wheeled round,
And he could drink with admirable gust
The glory of rude health and throw wide arms
To Nature's celebrations. Oh, the joy
With which he gambolled round his babes or took
The peasant children to his heart of hearts ;
Their free school was his life's first passion. Ah !
No mother knew her own child's voice as he,
Who taught each voice of them, taught every one
With the wise art of Paris which he learned.
In those bright halcyon days he taught them all
They ever learned, I think,—from alphabet
To swimming and folk-ditties ; built their minds,
Yet was a boy with them in all their pranks ;
Drew out their mother-wit and excellence,

Protesting with a smile he learned from them
All school had ever taught him. Ah ! he held
Book-learning very cheap, almost in scorn,
Save the old book of books, the book he named
The Homer of our Europe : yes, he was
Father and brother both ; I know it well ;
Was he not both to me ? Oh, the abandon
With which he raced the meadow, he and his friend,
Or moved in the early morning ere the dew
Had fallen from the petals and the tufts
Were drenched with incense sweet as July's hay ;
For he was ever simple as a child,
And loved, or used to love, such rivalries ;
And never comrade have I known more leal
To hunt the bear upon the Caucasus ;
To shoot the timid strepets as they rose,
Many and many a league we two have trudged :
And I have seen the great brow grow more tense
With brooding over Borodino's field,
Who weighed Napoleon in the balances
And found him wanting : I, his man-at-arms,
Never had ventured where he writes and writes
In solitary travail for the world
That is and is to follow : yet most strange,
Most wonderful it seems to me his wife,

The darling of his house, dare not surpass
That jealous threshold, gaze upon the face
She loves most dearly when most fraught with vision :
For how she loves him ! Was there ever a scribe
More skilled to track the clues of rays half lost,
More patient to combine with prodigal toil
(Did she not write his master-book seven times ?)
The flashings of this star ; to weave the threads
Flung loosely off into a wedding garment ?
Was ever woman more aware to catch
Her poet's language, howsoever it burst
Forth from the abyss of silence o'er the page
With mystery of twilight ? Has she not
Reflected all as in an angel's mirror ?
Conned Love's strange hieroglyphic from the first ?
Who shall now violate the zone which she
Has made inviolable ? Who dare invade
Such heavenly secrecy ? Nay, I must laugh,
Must laugh once more to think how Nature ever
Adds pertly some exception to the rule,
Breaks down our dearest fashions with a smile ;
Must laugh to think how but a little child,
His eldest born, their first, a crawling girl,
A tiny piece of prattling innocence,
A thing of tumbling curls and kisses,—she,

Ay, she it was alone who pushed with ease
The mother on one side, leapt o'er the pale,
Vanquished this obdurate will whenever the chance
Would seal two budding lips upon that door,
Importunate for answer. Who shall say
How many precious moments have been lost
By that sweet plaything babbling at his feet,
Or in the fond man's arms, most precious minutes,
Which otherwise had blessed a thousand souls.

But that was long ago, many long years ;
Things have changed much since then, have sorely
changed :

I will not say he loves his children less,
For who would venture that ?—but still his love
Stands hardly where it stood : I hear folk mutter
The universal brother in the man
Has swallowed up the father of his girls ;
He is become a holy father now :
Well, these are not my words ; yet there's a change :
It struck me sharp as daylight when we crossed
Calm eyes the other evening in his halls
After a long, long absence ; the old past
Is gone for ever : I shall never, I know,
Hunt with this brother more : the woes of woman

Have struck him to the marrow ; he has now
A new, a far-off look, as though he lives
Somewhat aloof from home. I think sometimes
My sister turns with fondness to the old ;
Quick words have even dropped between them now ;
The new life brings a burden to them both,
Something that must be borne ; at any rate,
She will not break her neck on his three rules,
How much she praises them as laws of Christ ;
She stands by his possessions, as one may
Who looks into the future, knows at least
The laws which rule in Moscow. Thus they sit
More grave together now, as friends will do
Who keep old loves despite some difference :
Only the second daughter clasps with all
Her maidenhood the iron bands of his
Monklike austerity. But yesterday
I glanced at the old study, while his chair
Stood empty for the nonce,—ah ! well, well now
Not even a servant enters ; like a priest,
He makes all pure within the sanctuary
Ere he begins the duty of the hour :
Upon the settle stood a pair of shoes
Worked for his friend the moujik ; as of old,
A pile of books and portraits choked the table ;

Mildly the marble bust of his dear brother
Gazed at me, gazing on the room I loved ;
Sphinx-like those Schopenhauer eyes,—the print
Which ever faces grimly from the wall,—
Seemed half to smile through their sardonic stare
At the weird changes they have gently watched
Flash o'er the bosom of this lover's world.

EPISTOLA A SUIS

MY orders were to take home letters on
To Alexandria : there from the blue
The news o'ertook us like a bolt of thunder,
Bringing our carrier-pigeon post-haste back
Once more to Tripoli. I see him now,
Much as I left him seated in his cabin,
The right leg propped a little : ay, he suffered
A good deal latterly from gout attacks ;
Hoped somewhat thus to ease him as he could
The rascal's parting shots : that is a point,
I mean the indisposition, which the court
Should rake out level : well, at least, dear friend,
That was how I last saw him ; orders first,
Direct and quietly, the same old way
He ever showed us brother officers,—
The extraordinary skipper : then a word
Of relaxation, as sometimes his wont,
Neither just blame or praise,—too grim for that,—

Yet something of a smile in the ring it gave
For that rash lucky dog or devil Vane
Of the *Bellerophon*,—you know the facts
From my last letter ; run your cutter's nose
Full tilt into a harbour's mouth, and miss
By one hair's breadth a lively foul with some
Big hulk or other, let alone, perhaps,
Your own chief's flagship—that was ever the way
To this commander's centre : last, of course,
The nod, the friendly handshake : I wheeled off,
And he weighed anchor. Thus 'tis obvious
My knowledge of the entire catastrophe
Sits much as yours, a passable second-hand ;
All I can do by way of supplement
To what you know already, or at least
Half think you know, as swallowed fresh and clear
From that great deep of fact redoubtable
(Our marvellous lake of salt fed by the Jordan)
The journals tumble on you, is to add,
Well, a few hints of caution : first of all,
'Tis clear enough to me (remember, friend,
The limitations I still emphasize)
When once your die was cast by these two men
Who took that signal,—well, let's say for once,
With something too much,—so it now appears,

But in that *now* lurks the whole difference,—
Of neither this or that nailed home with all
The shifts of a brave or bravely discreet captain
Put sudden on the proof, and nought was left
But to drive through the surf like men and face
All possible consequence. Ay, ay,—good Heavens !
The incredibly brief moment given for pause,
The terrible conciseness of the affair,
No less before than after hulls had struck,
Are just the additions your wise nobodies
Seem mainly to lose sight of. Take, for instance,
These broken straws of fact a midshipman
I chanced upon among the handful saved
Caught and delivered me out of the mass
Lost with those fearful minutes. What does he
Hold clearly of the truth from first to last,
If only you except the original crash
Which grinded to this creature's marrow-bone,
Making her tremble as an aspen does
Before the headlong boulder,—that and then
The general eddy to and fro, until
The entire ship's company were duly launched,
Or launched themselves into the trough of the sea,—
Why, next to nothing. “Up I rushed, of course,”—
Much in this way my youngster trolled his yarn,—

“ From cabin where a minute since I snoozed,
To find the other's ram just easing off
And letting in Noah's deluge ; men already
Were mostly at their stations : on the bridge,
Cool as Old Nick, or rather, I should say,
Nelson, perhaps,—he always played the chief
So handsomely with us slaved little chaps,—
Ay, not a crack about him, so it seemed,
His staff-commander well to hand,—he gave
Orders prompt right and left,—three minutes more,
Thanks to my post of vantage, I could see
Her slowly heading landward ; then, by Jove,
Draggled as any hare shot hard behind,
Or wounded bird in water, helplessly
Drift round and round, and settle by the bows,
With nasty jumps and starts, which grew in size
And ominous precision. How it fared
With the most of us after that first surprise
Flashed silence through the ship and sent each man
Quick march to wait for orders, few could tell,
I least of all ; it seemed that every one
Was smart to lend a hand, as though with a kind
Of instinct things were pretty bad, if not,
Well, quite so bad as they turned out for some
Poor devils ere the break up : as you know,

But precious little good came of it all ;
The water held a lead, and knew, by Gad,
How best to keep it : this I will be sworn,
Taking one last hard look on what was done
For man or ship, we fellows never thought
The chaplain would have turned the trumps he did,
Flashed us such real sound metal : 'twas through him
We got the sick off clear ; I'm not so sure
He was not just the coolest with his keen
Steady, lads, steady,—cool at the very moment
When most we wanted it ; ay, when the brute
Dropped suddenly on knees, as you may say,
For her mad somersault ere she dived down.
As for what happened in that skirr and squeeze,
When with what hint, or nod, or word, God knows,
Jack saw that he was loosed his last parade
To scramble for dear life, you might as well
Take counsel with your dreams : 'tis possible
A lad or two jumped off before the rest
From rail, or gun, or port-hole,—if they did,
Scared rabbits, who shall blame them ? What I hold
Before me now is our main company
Standing in line on deck, waiting the word,
The engineers still working down below ;
And then, well, half-a-dozen little things

That hardly touched when first I saw them pass,
They seemed so natural, but none the less
Have stuck to me somehow, and which I keep
And hold incorrigibly. Oh, they are nothing ;
Here half a hand to help some mate up first
Ere both leapt clear at last : I watched another
Shake off the diver's shell ere he made shift
For his own comfort : that Jack tar went down
With many a lad, doubtless, brave as himself :
One strapping fellow pulled up sudden with
His flash of inspiration : that one face,
Hair curl or scribbled nonsense, Heaven knows what,—
Kissed the thing fresh,—then dived. The last I saw
Of our poor chief, ay, at the very last,
Ere the damned turtle swung me round herself,—
Well, he was leaning forward on the bridge,
Holding with one hand tight the rail, as though
To save him from the lurch ; the other hand
Half shrouded o'er his eyes to keep away
What we were living through or soon should live ;
Or was his gaze to landward ? Which was it ?
And after that,—well, I have heard at least
Some one pulled some one, looking the drowned rat,
Into the *Anson's* pinnace there to dry.”
So much for facts strained fair as best one could,

And bottled for your palate, if you care
To taste so light a brewage ; yes, I know
What you will say,—what I have heard already ;
Some admiral or other condescends
To read us the pat lesson of it all,
Much as I give it you, inditing thus
From tutelar retirement :—“ Oh, of course
Such things must happen, faults in our good luck,
Even with the best of captains ; only fools
Will deem it possible that all is learned
Which must be learned if we are still to keep,
In her strange modern bulwarks, steel and iron,
Old England mistress of her ancient seas,
Without some hitch or jar occasionally
From sinister event : and yet,—well, well,
I cannot still help thinking, in my time,
When I was posted out there first in rank,
Another spirit had more elbow-room ;
How style the difference I have in mind ?
A sort of give and take, as you may say,
In abler, heartier fashion. Why, bless me,
Well I remember now just such a pinch,
Which, but for this deft hand to needy friends,
Might have made friends at home stare wild enough.
We were just starting for the summer cruise ;

Some daft lieutenant,—that I think was it,—
Mistook some signal ; well, the *Achilles* ran,
Or looked like running right abeam the bows
Of Tryon's vessel, doomed to founder there :
Nothing but exquisite adjustment of two heads,
A treat for every youngster who looked on,—
Maybe ourselves no less,—set things to rights ;
Slowly the pair drew level side by side,
Kissed as two little children might, at most
A chance plate sprung, a coat of paint knocked off,
A handrail smashed, a boat's loose gear rolled up :
That was how we pushed through our troubles then,
And trampled smooth our blunders as they rose.”—
I wonder if your laugh chimes here with that
I volunteered, perhaps too liberally,
When some one droned this out the other day
Before our mess, with all the circumstance
Due to such absolute wisdom ? Ay, bless me,
’Tis easy now for any fool to meet
That startling signal with the dexterous stare :
“ The chief is mad for once,—we’ll improvise
Our wits to right the balance, pipe his tune
With one slight variation, safe to keep
Huge dolphins well in bound, and win, of course,
A world of praise for prudence aptly joined

To Cæsar's calculation." Ah ! my friend,
First, we have still to prove this admiral
Was ever just the fumbler many seem
To argue, proved by this,—his ship went down ;
Ay, that he took with sudden lapse of brain
His three and three for eight instead of six,
Forgot arithmetic and all that marks
Two eyes above the common ; more than this,
Far more than this, my friend : what if this man
Was better at all points than you or I,
Or any other captain in command
That day or this, was like perhaps to risk
The larger stake because he knew he was
Best qualified to win it back again
By ready sleight of hand, supreme alertness,
Ay, even in face of odds ? What if you thought,—
" Why spoil his tight-rope dancing and bring down
The wrath of all the gods upon one head ?"
Well, he looked that to us,—to me at least
He stays just where he stood : something there was
About him, call, baptize it what you will,
You never could so sure prognosticate,
And never will do now for all your pains :
Prudent he was, of course, and most exact
In discipline and method, none more so ;

Yet all the while he seemed to force on you
The laboured pressure of your martinet,
Keeping men under him most cordially
Obedient to close traces, you perceived
He stood himself to the rule on easy terms,
By no means held a captive to the bounds,
He pegged so carefully for those who trimmed
Their courses to his pennant : brief, there was
Something in this man's locker stowed away,
A kind of ghost or devil, which you please,
Kept under hatches mostly with a will,
Yet not so thrust aside but that you seemed
To catch a whiff of it in all he did :
How else explain that far-off smile, the way
He ever had of threshing out his plans
To the last grain or mote material,
Before you got an inkling from his mouth
What move was next to follow ; how adduce
Fit argument or reason why it was
This air of calm superiority
Was just what made you love him, the man born
Clearly to be your master ; what is still
More pertinent, he dropped us scores of signs
We had a man to deal with, no dead log
Likely to trip up England when she towered

In wrath above her quarry. Ah ! thank Heaven,
We still have salts among us in whose veins
The blood of the stout Saxon courses blue,
Boisterous and hale, who, rather than toy out
The grand old English game upon the seas
Like little boys, who sail their bauble boats
Clutching the shore meanwhile, would, damn it all !
Pitch to the waves home orders. He was one :
Yes, yes, I hear your tune : " France hugs her ships,
Strands on no reefs, sinks with no admirals ;
And what of Russia ? " A truce, a truce, my friend,
To such comparisons. Who knows, at least,
What Russia has to learn or France shall lose
Ere both make wholly good the headway gained
In these most precious hours of preparation,
Flashed on you now for the moment, but no more ;
Flashed, luckily for pride, at our worst turn :
While all that he has taught, this English skipper,
In mastering true science, growing keen
Through the least prick of sense to his intention ;
Alert enough,—I wave you this apart,—
To follow with a good ten knots, nor see
One signal flying at his masthead, ay,
As though he ran with decks raked smooth still
leading,—

All this, I say, is now as always hidden,
Shoved out of sight of France or Italy,
To bide the day of sober reckonings
When ships waltz round in earnest. Well, ah ! well,—
Our bearings standing thus, I'll risk the doubt,—
A sailor's notion, take it for its worth,—
Whether from first to last this excellent brain
Was fallen into such trance, such very strange
Suspended animation as some still
Would dearly force upon us : notice, please,
In coming to conclusions not a trace
Of relative suspicion crossed me when
I shook his hand at the last : further, I hear
His staff-commander would have us believe
That to his meek demurrer there came back
Shortly for answer,—ay, this should be so, sir,—
Your distance, as you say,—may we not add,
No less persisted in once more, it seems,
To mighty little purpose : last consider
The hint we have,—or so it brushed my ear
From half-a-dozen whispers up and down,—
Of how this master briskly stepped the bridge
With that same,—well, with all we just have
notched,—
Say, the whole blessed fleet there right and left,

Staring him with truth's bluntness frank in the face,—
Why, in his best,—but no, enough of that,
That flash in the pan from some who ought to know,
Speaking with half a breath,—no wonder now,
His future washed behind them : when such men
Blow steam off thus, in such rare tingling moments,
Why then comes the smart action. Brief, I hold,—
A sailor's notion, once more I repeat,—
'Tis best to clutch this straw, however strange,
Our man was on his mettle, with the facts
Sounding within his brain-pan steadily,
Much as they boomed for others, it may be
Not wholly toned to the wise apprehension,
Hardly in the full daylight of his judgment,
Yet touched with a possible something to be braved
And driven through with flash of the old star.
There sits the probable. Beyond the outline
I press not my ambition. Oh, of course,
There will be fools, however, prompt enough
To blurt the query, "What, by Hercules,
Roused from its lair your priceless *stowed-away*
To such uncalled-for hazards?" Let them blurt :
Mokes of like colour doubtless will be found
To bray them a loud answer,—loudest there
Where men will catch the whisper : let them blare,—

Try to wring out the pulse of a big soul
By rending it to tatters. We will simply
Content ourselves with this surmise,—for once,
Once in the sovereign measure of his service
The lion proved too much for the strong man,
Who paid for his lost foothold,—as was meet,—
With the dear life-blood. Yet I think that England
Has seen the thunder of her own hale heart
Give tongue from this her captain ; seen, an instant,
When all her realm was rocked in gentle peace,
That which is still more worthy of her heart
Than even the lion's daring, ay, the man
Of faith and duty, able to endure,
The man delivered in that company
Of her lost flagship, when the actual
And very crisis, stuffed with imminent death,
Rushed onward at the flow with gaping jaws
Of merciless destruction : there's a jewel
Worthy of her to cherish and hold pure
With loving memories : but, nevertheless,
We lose him from our sight, a loss for England,
When she shall look for captains great as many
An iron battleship : such may be had
For the mere cost of the building ; he is not :
Gold cannot bring this sailor back to her ;

Nothing shall find him out : anchored he is
Beyond gold's reach and all her silver seas.

Enough of him, enough. One word or two
Simply about myself ; picture me now
Snug in my corner of the *Scout* : o'erhead
A stiff breeze blowing from a dirty sky,
Swilling the upper decks with gusts of rain :
Here am I coasting half a mile or less
From the very scene of all I just have told you ;
Ordered, worse luck, to loiter up and down
Some three days more searching for tag or sign
Of man or wreckage ; there out in the distance,
I hear the moan of it beyond the surf,
The shore is strewn with froth of spars and iron,
Fragments from her loose fittings flung, no doubt,
From that tremendous dive on the rock's face ;
But nothing yet worth notice we have seen,
Thank God for His late mercies. As I look
Straight through my porthole's window, a strange bird,
No ordinary gull or gannet that,
Is wheeling in wide circles o'er the spot ;
Ha ! there she strikes her treasure underneath ;
Is off, let's hope, the richer ; lucky bird,
To rob the king of spoilers of some treat :

What does he care though, with his scornful laugh ;
Nature's barbarian, hugging the bones
Which none shall loose from him,—none, evermore :
Heavens ! that I now could stand where I stood firm
A brief month since, far, far enough from this
Ill-fated threshing-floor,—high up the spurs
Of the Anti-Lebanon : before me stretched
The illimitable desert lone and bare,
Stalked by the columned whirlwind, shutting fast,
Or rather setting fine its emerald,
That jewel of oases, lovely queen
Of Eastern cities, ay, Damascus ; there
We halted early morning,—ere the day
Flushed gold across the barriers to this coast,—
Hailing from Baalbec ; looked upon it all,
Mountain, and desert, last, the precious isle
Of green-lit dwellings. Oh, what desolation,
What ruined grandeur clings to this same Baalbec ;
One mighty block, a thousand tons and more
We marked on the quarried mountain, waiting still
The extraordinary carriage ; who stepped in
And forced these Hittite lads to break off thus ?
Answer me that : a downright sort of man
And difficult was Captain Joshua,
If, as I gathered, in this lordly fashion

He rooted up molesters in the rear
To strengthen his main footing,—bold and thorough,
Just such a leader as our chief, in fact,
Where Hermon fronts in arms the sandy desert,
Upon his limestone quarter, that's to say,
The side which faced the blast and wintry sea,
And any Russ or Frenchman bearing down
On the bright strip of island, which he served
Better than most of us, ay, that he did
For all his last adventure : well, some time
We'll run up closer to this expedition,
Beating it out together as the others,
Through, ah ! Mycenæ and the rest ; but now
Farewell : in truth I cannot quit me of
All that has happened since, and,—well of that
You've heard too much already. By-the-bye,
I hold the last clear order from his hand
Which left at least his cabin : there it rests,
And you shall have a glance at it some day.

HELLAS AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

I HAVE a friend, and thus at last he writes :—

“ Here I am back again, and late at nights

I see above St. Paul's,—the world you know,—

The pale moon hang as now three weeks ago,

Sheltered from the sharp wind beneath some pines,

Which curled about the very topmost lines

Of the Arcadian hills I saw her range

Above the shadows of the rock, and change

Loose shreds of cloud upon Night's iron blue

Into pure silver as her face swept through :

I watched the deep gloom take the dawn's first
throes,

And a big fox brushed near me as I rose.

“ That was my walk,—my walk of yesterday,—

From Argos and Mycenæ all the way

To the Olympian plain, to where the broad

Alphæus cuts the dark sea's silver cord ;

Each step a step of glory, and a joy
Unfathomable ; a gift none can destroy.

“ The mists of dawn were lifting, and her smiles
Already touched the foreheads of the isles
When first we swept into those sacred waters,
Gazed over Hellas, looked on her fair daughters :
What thoughts were ours as every name took form,
However changed and battered by the storm
Of jarring peoples, foolishness, or crime ;
All the rough elements your despot Time
Hurls against earth’s fond loves, however dear,
However they have brought to man good cheer :
Yes, there stretches Corcyra ; here we come
In sight, almost in hail, of Actium ;
That must be Sicyon, that Ithaca ;
Anon we shall slip by old Megara :
Beyond there lies Eleusis ; what is this
But the famed threshing-floor of Salamis ?
And there—God’s mercy !—safe against the blue,
What but the eye of Greece and Europe too,
Immortal Athens ? Surely we might say
Our *Nunc dimittis* after such a day.
Ay, we have trudged the very Peloponnese,
Carried off as by stealth our golden fleece ;

Five naked columns with dishevelled curls
Mark the place once so famous for its girls
Your decent folk could barely get at them,
Now all is safer than Jerusalem :
And I have supped at Thebes ; was driven over
Cithæron's back, while the calm night, my lover,
Seemed to look down upon the enterprise
With all the wonder in her dancing eyes :
Under clear stars I drove,—walked back again
While Phoebus flashed his car above the plain ;
And now my perfect Sabbath-day is done
The angry gods have thundered ; Thebes is gone :
And all the world is asking what the deuce
Has stirred the lawless violence of Zeus ?
But Zeus, forsooth, is not the grand Earth-shaker,
(More than he is the world's chief undertaker)
That is Poseidon's rôle. You think it odd
This England should have chosen him for god ;
But which god, friend ? The ruler of the seas,
The wonder of the darling songs of Greece,
Or the immortal shaker of the shops
Theban and,—ah ! but ” (thus the quaint pen
drops)
“ Who cares to listen to another's joy,
Save possibly myself, who from a boy

Ever loved traveller's tales." How like my friend
To toss you his with only half an end.

So runs the letter : here is Whitsunday :
Therefore this morning while folk marched to pray
In church or chapel, doubtless with a will,—
(John Wesley was born here ; his voice works still),—
I wandered with my friend's tale up the cliff
Which overlooks the bay, to snatch a whiff
Out of another world ; I like to be
Somewhat above the tumbling of the sea ;
Where the wave sounds and yet you stand alone,
Are not half dazed by the persistent moan ;
Rather from your high station well apart
Can look the better into the wild heart
Which quivers there below you on the turf,
And breaks and breaks for ever into surf :
The field was very sweet with fresh young clover,
And underneath the incumbent sapphire, over
Soft sand and shingle waters shimmered clear
As any gleaming wave of Rivière ;
Clear as the foam whence Aphrodite rose
To gladden Greece and build up Helen's woes ;
All things around, sweet earth and trembling brine,
No less than the great air, throbbed with the shine

So fresh and beautiful beneath that sun,
You might have dreamed the world had just begun ;
You might have said, " Man lives here to enjoy :
As for his art, it is a helpless toy :
For when rich Nature gives us all she hath,
He harvests but the merest aftermath."

Within this little hamlet by the sea
Two persons mainly link themselves to me,
Or, truer said perhaps, I lean their way,
Though why I do I cannot really say :
First of the pair and eldest, fisherfolk
Who loiter by the pier and idly smoke
Will introduce as artist of the town,—
A man who once stepped closer to renown
Than he does here,—a genuine fallen star ;
So it is whispered at the Anchor's bar,—
A spot our broken-down often frequents,—
Somewhat too oft, 'tis said ; at all events,
If never quite an R.A. with full rights,
He used to flare it with your lesser lights
In London's veritable atmosphere,
Until some fate or other drove him here,
And blew, or nearly blew, his candle out.
However that may be, he flits about

Like an uneasy ghost, making small sketches,
Thankful indeed if one of them just fetches
Enough to square the losses of a day :
All sprout up somehow,—well, as you may say,
From hand to mouth, the same haphazard way,—
A pencil's scrawl, colour's most hasty flash,
To bring in the week's rent or Monday's hash.
A hungry sort of look he pins on you
From weak and timid eyes of washed-out blue ;
His brow has ribbed itself like an oak log ;
He looks for all the world just like a dog
Which has so oft been sent a-cold and skipping,
He lives in constant dread of some fresh whipping ;
And yet you see (here is the touch which clings)
He tries to put a decent face on things ;
Wears a trim sailor's cap above that suit
Of worn-out tweed which covers the starved root ;
Gently returns the friendly nod you wave
With a wan sort of smile which leaves you grave :
My friend the Captain whipped him on to me,
Much as your useless wight is shipped to sea :
‘ Well, here's my card ; I have done all I can,—
Tackle our latest visitor, my man ;
I mean the eccentric stranger, who, like you,
Though minus brushes, stares so at the view,—

Has nothing else, apparently, to do.”
So up the fellow comes, he and his wares,
Bows meekly, stammers out his daily prayers :
Wherewith for answer : “Sir, I shall rejoice
To make my visit some day, take my choice,
Down there in your snug,—ay, your studio,—
The precious sanctum, where, as we all know ;”—
But what is this ?—pale eyes begin to drop ;
He owns one room above a blacksmith’s shop ;
So, not to trespass on his bedroom candle,
I seize the first he offers me to handle ;
He takes my silver ; I remark the while
An evanescent gleam, a passing smile
Upon the distant cliff : Oh, yes, he knows
That headland well : then both the visit close
With a few words upon the unusual rain :
Out the man shuffles : I admire again
My masterpiece,—with something of a sigh :
Yes, there it is ; flagrant against the sky
Your Devil’s Rock,—painted,—I know not why,—
A rich and ruddy brown ;—well, all I mean
To say is, that the rocks as they are seen
Are chalk, and white as only chalk can be ;
But then the clouds behind are grey, you see ;
If heaven is white, your earth must stand up brown ;

You surely would not have them both agree :
Besides, it is the work of art, friends say,
To contradict the eyes of every day :
My ignorant wife stares at it with a frown ;
“ We cannot take such daubs, John, back to town.”

There is another man in this snug place
I meet occasionally ; a most strange face :
A strapping fellow though. When quite a lad
One of his people frightened him so bad
The scare induced a chronic state of fits,
And still the lurking demon near him sits :
He hails from some poor village in the north,
Whence twenty years ago stout youth set forth
To build a future in some western State,—
Bought a ranch farm, I think, he and a mate.
Alas ! he took with him life's handicap ;
I know not what it was,—the chance mishap,—
A horse was lost, one day he spoiled the pot ;
At any rate the partner swore he'd got
A wretched bargain ; so forthwith he comes
Back once again to England, twiddling thumbs,—
His future gone,—himself a good deal worse
For wear and tear,—not a half cent in purse :
Since then he's put his hand to several things,

But tried still more to grass the brute who flings
Him suddenly a cripple on his back,
With every nerve and muscle on the rack.
But nothing comes of it ; some one renowned
Sends him at last the cure to make him sound ;
Smoke is eschewed, we'll say, six hungry weeks ;
The Anchor is forgotten ; his pale cheeks
Flush with apparent victory over odds ;
He writes the grateful letter, thanks the gods :
Ah ! but it is the merest gleam he gets ;
He lives a hermit's life, fool of long debts
To a remorseless creditor, who plays
With him much as a spider from his maze
Toys with a fly : the leech accepts the cheque ;
Before his patient looms once more,—the wreck !
He lives alone, poor wight, for who shall come
And make that little room of his a home ?
You would not have his sisters take their chance
Of sharing such a sad inheritance ;
Besides, the board of two or three is rather
An outlay when all lean upon their father.
As for that worthy man, the son, I fear,
Never got out of him very much cheer.
Well, well ! such sons are wild—strange any way :
I took a walk with him the other day,

Started as best I could on that and this,
Well, not a thing I touched but seemed to miss ;
Nothing took fire or roused his speech in turn :
Without precisely seeming me to spurn,
He answered much as your crack witness does
Who gives the court quite simply half he knows ;
“ ’Tis very kind, this zeal to clear my case,
Only such energy seems out of place.”
And after all, life has its closer ties ;
Nature respects nobody who defies
Her jurisdiction : Pope is born dead lame ;
Schumann dies mad ; at least you will not blame
Some one I know out here, who must have mused
Much in the following way ere he refused,—
Well, you will see. “ What a sad tale George told
My aunt the other day ; she is too old
And shaky for such things. What was it, now ?
How blunt my memory begins to grow ;
About a loving daughter and a father,—
The father was quite blind, I think, or rather
Became so,—well, she did as daughters should,
Nursed him with care, led him from that dark wood—
A father, too, who once had kicked her lover ;
Spare youth, of course, had not sufficient cover
For such a match, but afterwards grew fine,

And even took the gruff old father in ;
Made him a home. The father found his eyes :
As for the daughter, this was her surprise—
Or shall we dare to say the resurrection
Of her most sweet, invincible affection,—
Her little son, her first, was born,—alas !
Just what her father had become and was
But for this tending. What is worst of all,
Such things do veritably happen, fall
On rare occasions : it would never do
If Rachel's child turned all at once dark-blue ;
Therefore, it seems, we now must draw the line,—
Bridges, I fear, must come no more to dine ;
Which is a pity now ; he likes the way
She sings her songs ; she likes to sing and play
To any one who listens as he does ;
But that is all the worse for my repose :
I often wonder who it is who sits
Providing Earth with Earth's due share of fits."

So Bridges keeps away, and solitude
Becomes still more and more his daily food.
He is the second of my singular pair,
Who possibly have never said a prayer ;
At any rate both leave well in the lurch

The imposing chapel here and pretty church :
I wonder what this morning both have done
While I have basked beneath a glorious sun.

To-day is Whitsunday ; as I have said
Two or three times, it runs so in the head,
Doubtless for some good reason ; and the view
This morning shone out pure, christened anew ;
There up above no least soft foam-flake lay
To tarnish for a moment the blue way ;
Victoriously the imperial orb rose up
And filled with his oblations God's great cup :
This afternoon the storm clouds rushed abreast
Out of their mighty haven down the west,
In massed battalions they surged up and rolled
Their mutiny against the Light's strong hold ;
As though with one intent to kill and slay
The god who made them servants of the Day—
The god who drew their rabble from the Night,
To worship him with glory and the might
Of matchless armouries, ten thousand plumes,—
Soldiers of him who all the earth illumines.

Out of this peaceful ville, whose castle fills
The sudden fracture in these hog-backed hills,

(Oh, gallant lady, who so long defended
The ancient fastness cruel Time hath rended,—
Oh, the brave tale which all its death doth crown !)
I walked with one I love over the down
Which heaves its billow right into the sea ;
And all that walk, there to the north of me,
The legions of the storm deployed their force
Triumphant o'er the scattered plain's concourse :
And underneath the tempest of their wheels
The darkness lowered in tremendous seals :
Oft, too, as the fierce army burst across
With many a shattered squadron, many a loss,
The captains of the host closed up dense lines,—
A giant regiment,—whose swart ensigns
Were hurried on and on tumultuously
O'er forest, moorland, tilth, and wine-dark sea ;
And all at once from the charged undulation
The artillery burst forth, an inundation
Which married heaven and earth, which kissed and
 kissed
Till everything beyond was lost in mist ;
Out of which fearful onset the troop passed
Spoiled of its strength, a broken wraith, aghast,
Which died in agonies upon the field
Of terrible battle, even while it reeled

In overthrow. High on the bridge of war,
That waving down, we stood, and there I saw
The sweetest, fairest sight of all yet seen
To-day, fair though in truth the morn has been ;
There I beheld it looking o'er the sea
To where that southern island suddenly
Breaks from the blue with its soft belt of white,
The island where he lived, glad in his might,
Who loved this England, loved yet more his
friend,—

May England's love of him his loves defend ;
And this is the strange sight which came to me
Over the shuddering o'er-shadowed sea :
First, a huge cloud, with mighty waterspout
Cast, as it were, from heaven in awful rout,
Struck the sea's face in a tremendous fall
Of sheeted rain : therewith upon that wall,
Flashed through some secret window of the tent,
Which hid from earth heaven's spacious firmament,
The glory which proceeds out of the blue,
Smote violently the rain's mass through and
through,
With all the colours which are seen to grow,
Melting each other, on the Iris bow ;

No silken veil of Persia or of Ind
Ever with greater subtlety combined
All that is rich and tender, soft and fair,
In heavenly colour, than God's curtain there
Outspread above the sea, against the dark ;
No trace I saw of the consummate arc,
Rather that one great cloud, as it fell, bare,
Thick with its watery bulwarks and four-square,
Opened, swift as a troubled bird its wings,
To take the marvellous transfigurings
Heaven's light affirms ; grew gentle e'en as Heaven
When the last blessing of the sun is given
E'er he is gone ; with endless such degrees
Of shade and delicate transparencies,
The downpour softened ; through which crown of
light
The crested billows and the belt of white
Shone and then vanished : never shall I forget
How that sea glimmered in pure violet.

Sunshine and storm, the sea, the glow, the shore,
That isle the poet loved—what symbol more
Was needed to uplift a heart and stay
The dream of Hellas here on such a day,
Unless it be the Night above them all,

With open arms and dazzling coronal ?
Oh, friend, who write from a full heart and close
Your writing with the thought—"Who loves or knows
A brother's joy?" Ask rather—"Who can tell
A brother's sorrow?" And yet Love knows well.

THE END

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